

Inbound and Content Marketing Made Easy

Marcus Sheridan

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Introduction: What this eBook can do for YOU...

****Read this First!! An Introduction to Inbound Marketing Made Easy**

Have you ever experienced something so great and profound that you just had to share it with others?

Well if you have, then you'll understand well what motivated this work, which in many ways, is a labor of love.

Quick Background

As you will come to see as you read the words herein, **The Sales Lion** was started in November of 2009, mainly as a result of the growth and prosperity my swimming pool company received after we embraced **HubSpot** and the principles of inbound marketing. Because the application of these principles truly snatched our company from sure bankruptcy, I've now spent the last 24 months trying to help folks just like you catch the vision of what is inbound and content marketing— In a way that's **easy to understand** and applicable to any business.

Why This eBook is Different

What makes this work unique is the fact that everything you'll read here is **real**. It's all personal experience. No “great ideas” without application (something that drives me nuts). So if you read it here, you can rest assured it has already been tried and tested.

Upon reading this book, you'll learn clear and concise strategies by which you can embrace everything about content and inbound marketing, especially when it comes to blogging for business.

How to Read this Book

Because this book consists of many blog posts I've written over the past couple of years, **not all may apply to your situation**. This is absolutely fine, which is why everything is arranged easily so you can find the chapters and subjects of most worth to you, as some will help and others will not. This being said, the more you read these pages and inspiring stories, the more you'll catch a vision of marketing previously unimagined by you and/or your employees.

I'm Here to Help

One last thing before you get started. As you've probably noticed from reading The Sales Lion, I'm the type of guy that appreciates community, relationships, and helping others. This is why I love it when readers contact me with their questions, comments, etc. Feel free to email me any time at: **Marcus1@thesaleslion.com**.

Good luck to you in this process and may the teachings of this book help you and your family experience great financial peace and success in the years ahead.

Marcus Sheridan

The Sales Lion

Chapter 1: The Vision that is Inbound Marketing

Just How Much Can 800 Days of Inbound Marketing Change Your Life??

Jan 2005: Our swimming pool business is in shambles. My two business partners and I have just found out that we've suffered a major embezzlement of about \$200,000. Not only that, but [the IRS is after](#) us and has put liens on our homes. I've never worked so hard to experience so much stress and hardship. Frankly, it's depressing, and I wish it would just all go away.

Nov 2008: For three years we have fought tooth and nail to bring our business out of this hole. And just when we see the light, the economy has tanked. Banks are failing everywhere. Consumer confidence, especially for luxury items like swimming pools, is in shambles. I can't believe this is happening again. Many swimming pool companies are already closing shop. We've worked too hard and come too close to fail now.

March 2009: I just stumbled across a company called [HubSpot](#) and learned about **inbound marketing**. This makes complete sense to me. Finally, I can take control of our website despite my tech deficiencies and also do what I do best—**teach**. But now I'm going to do this thing they call "blogging." Dumb name, but hey, the concept makes sense.

If I just answer consumer questions Google will reward me with more visits, which should ultimately turn to leads and then sales. Despite the "recession" our country is in, I believe this is our answer, and I'm going to make it work. Even better, for the first time in years, I'm excited to be a business owner again.

Nov. 2009: Wow, I'm shocked at these last seven months. This "inbound marketing" stuff is amazing. We have somehow survived this year, even though so many of our competitors have gone out of business with the economy. Everyone keeps telling me there is no one buying, but I'm glad they're not looking at my website analytics, because they indicate otherwise.

Also, I've decided to start another blog because I sense an insatiable desire to help other businesses experience the success I'm finding through inbound marketing. The site will be called **The Sales Lion**, and something tells me it just may change my life.

Sept. 2010: What a year it has been. The economy is still in peril, but my swimming pool

company continues to thrive. All of the blogging we've done over the past 18 months has put us literally on top of the industry. Leads and sales are strong and we've never spent less in advertising and marketing. This thing is like a snowball rolling down a mountain, and it's just amazing to sit back and watch it grow. I think we're going to actually turn a nice profit this year.....simply unbelievable.

As for The Sales Lion, things have grown slowly. It has been a struggle at times, as I honestly thought growth would come quicker. Notwithstanding, my resilience is undeterred, as I'm committed to this for the long haul, and I know a tipping point will eventually come.

March 2011: Wow, my pool company is going great and The Sales Lion is doing even better. About four months ago I seriously committed to [building my online network and community](#) (as before I'd just been writing) and the results have been profound. The number of active readers has taken off. People are talking and now I'm getting more and more companies asking me for help with inbound marketing. Life is going very fast now; it's almost hard to keep up, but it appears that the tipping point has finally arrived.

August 2011: Where should I start? It's only August and my swimming pool company has pools to install practically until the **end of the year**, something we've never come close to experiencing this early before. We've gotten more leads this year than in the previous two combined. My business partners and I just sit back and watch the pings on our Blackberries come in with one lead after another looking for someone to come out and sell them a swimming pool.....very exciting to say it in the least.

In all honesty though, we deserve it. We committed to being the premier teachers in our industry and that's exactly what we are. When I put my site on HubSpot's platform in March of 2009 it only had 20 total pages. Today it has about 600 or so.

Each and every day we get calls from around the country from folks asking us if we'd be willing to travel out to them and install their swimming pool. Sadly, we have to turn many down, as we're limited to VA and MD, but the lesson remains the same—**consumers trust those persons that are willing to openly and honestly give as much helpful information as possible.**

Financially, the company has never been better. At this point and time, we have almost no debt. The embezzlement and IRS are a distant memory. And it feels very, very good.

Time to Run Free

But that's not the only thing that is changing. For quite some time I have felt like a stallion, caged-up by my pool business commitments, yet wanting so badly to run free so as to pursue my other interests. Up until this point, I have been unable to break free, but the impacts of inbound

marketing are now allowing me to do just that.

This week (Aug 8-12) will be my last full time week at [River Pools and Spas](#). It's almost surreal to say it, but it's happening. No more will I drive five to eight hours daily to go on sales appointments. My only duties will be the company's inbound marketing, which will take 10-15 hours per week, and the rest will be taken care of by commissioned sales persons.

Now that I'm able to run wild, I can't even start to express my excitement, as **The Sales Lion** has now entered a new phase as well. Businesses are contacting me on a weekly basis seeking for someone to give them a vision of inbound and content marketing. What's crazy is that I haven't even pushed my services hard up to this point. But that's how inbound marketing works. You gain trust through great information, not silly sales pitches, which is why clients and companies come to you, versus the other way around.

As an example, next month I'll be speaking at a variety of businesses and events around the country.

All Because of One Decision

My point in saying these things is not to brag, but to simply give readers a **clear vision** as to how this has all happened. When it comes down to it folks, the decision to embrace inbound marketing has changed my life. **It has changed the lives of all my employees.** It has brought me to a point of being able to experience financial peace and prosperity while doing what I love most—teaching other individuals and businesses how to reach their potential, through speaking and writing. And even better, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

So for those of you that have been dabbling with inbound marketing, I say **what's the hold up?** What's preventing you and your business from reaching the potential that awaits? Enough already, giddy-up cowboy, it's time for the ride of your life.

Internet Marketing, Small Business Owners, and How a Big Dummy Like Me Learned Web Design

I've talked quite a bit in the past regarding the importance of powerful, information-filled websites to satiate consumer needs for any business in the 21st century. So considering we all agree about such a statement, I want to address a subject that many small business owners (and professional sales persons) are doing their best to ignore and sidestep:

Web Site Design.....Done by YOU

Before we talk about the reasons why 21st century business owners must take control of their websites, I want to give you a brief feel for my previous knowledge of computers and what helped me come to my current opinions on this critically important subject matter.

I'm no computer nerd

I did not grow up in a “tech” environment. We didn’t use computers. And electronics in general were not a major component of our home. Even in high school, I did not take computer classes. And believe it or not, I didn’t even learn to type until I was in college.

Simply stated, computers have never been my “thing.” I’ve never been savvy with Information Technology and I thought I’d never get my arms around it.....that was, until, the following took place:

Small Businesses and Web Design

About nine years ago I went into business for myself with two other partners. To make a long story short, it was our goal to become the premier inground swimming pool company in the United States.

For the first two years of our business, in 2001 and 2002, we didn’t even have a website. At this time, Internet marketing for businesses was just starting to take off and neither I nor my business partners had a clue as to anything to do with computers other than how to type a Word document.

Our marketing efforts at this time were very old school: radio, print, cable TV, etc. Needless to say, it was one sad marketing campaign at River Pools and Spas.

Around 2004, I started dabbling with a company web site. Obviously, I had to outsource everything and the results of our company webpage during this time were less than stellar.

Essentially, the few pages of the site looked like a glorified business card and we appeared to receive few leads from this new medium. Notwithstanding, we did notice two major trends: Normal advertising, especially print and radio, was starting to get outrageously expensive. More and more people were starting to see the Internet as their go-to source for information, especially when shopping for a product.

Embracing Information Technology

Feeling the need to eventually be the best, I started getting online and trying to learn basic web design. I also studied general Search Engine Optimization (SEO) concepts. Because everything I was learning was self-taught, the progress was appalling.

Around 2006, we started working with a really good web designer. Because I was now starting to see just how **information** was a critical component of a great website, I was constantly emailing or calling our web guy for him to make updates, changes, additions, etc.

As this went on for a little over two years, I realized two more important trends: Outsourcing all of your business' web design, including simple changes, can get pretty expensive. Outsourcing also causes delays and limits in a business owner's (or marketer's) ability to be creative with whatever new ideas come to mind.

Time to Learn

With these realizations, I went to my web designer and had him teach me basic web design principles using Dreamweaver. Frankly, I was sick and tired of being a web dummy and was committed to make a change. Although much of it was over my head, I could at least now go into my website and make simple text changes, announcements, etc. on the fly.

With this newfound ability, my creative juices really started flowing and I wanted to learn more. In fact, my ultimate goal was to have the complete ability to design my own website, inside and out.

It was also during this time that the Internet's value to businesses across the world really started to catch fire. Ours was no different and with the help of Adwords, we soon were getting more and more traffic on our website. Although Adwords usage was expensive, it was bringing us much needed marketing results.

We were also getting a lot of comments regarding the amount of information found on the site from customers. By the end of 2008, it was easy to see that consumers were serious about their research, and it was my job as a business owner to give it to them. But I knew I had to do more.

HubSpot and CMS.....WOW!

Weighing heavily on my mind the need to reach another level of web design and consumer education, I was blessed to find the company HubSpot at the beginning of 2009. [HubSpot](#) (and no, I'm not an affiliate) is an SEO company that helps businesses understand proper web marketing. They have a mountain of free information on their website, including their famous [Webgrader page](#) (it will grade your website, very cool), video seminars, forums, articles, etc.

I devoured much of the information on their site and learned about their CMS (CMS stands for Content Management System, which is a web design tool that allows even the biggest Tech-Dummies like me to produce awesome websites after just a small amount of time and practice.) I realized that I could actually design my own site front to back without knowing ANY CODE/HTML.

Despite the fact that I'm light years from being a computer programmer, I've been able to accomplish this in the last 11 months of working with a CMS from HubSpot. I have the most well known blog in the swimming pool industry(on my website) [My website](#) gets views from an average of 10 countries a day. We spend very little with Google Adwords now because we have such tremendous organic(free) search success. Our site is chock-full of photos, videos, articles, lead capture forms, etc. Frankly, customers **RAVE** about it.

Simply put, HubSpot has transformed my business completely and it has helped me realize that even a computer dufus like me now has the tools available to be a web designer. HubSpot is one of many CMS systems that are popping up all over the Internet and if you are a business owner considering taking this leap of faith in yourself and your own abilities, and I can assure you such a leap will change your life in an incredibly positive way.

The Future

No longer can small business owners shy away from Information Technology. No longer can they leave the heartbeat of their business in the hands of some guy or gal behind a desk that really knows very little about the essence of their business.

In my opinion, it starts with this simple belief:

“No one knows more about my business than I do. No one can teach and talk about my service and products as I can. I know I can design my own website and the days of me having the self-identity of not being tech-savvy are over. I am now embracing the future.”

3 Amazing Ways Content Marketing Can Change You, Your Company, and Your Life

There is a movement afoot in businesses around the globe folks. And frankly, this is a movement that excites me more than anything I've seen in a long, long time—and it's going to change the world of business as we know it.

Looking Within for Change

More and more, younger employees of companies all over the world are **taking it upon themselves** to introduce the power of content and inbound marketing to their CEOs and managers. Because the idea of social media, blogging, etc is so much more prevalent with the “younger generation” (not always though), these 20 and 30 some things are doing their best to convince their bosses that there is a better way of marketing than the methods that have been used over and over again for the past 50 years.

It is because of this movement that the #1 question I get from readers, other than how to build a blogging community, comes from those persons looking for the proper manner in which to introduce this new way of marketing to their boss.

Such was the case about eight months ago when I talked to a young man named Jason. (For the sake of privacy, I'm going to leave off his last name and company info.) After talking with him about this issue many months ago, I received the following letter (word for word) from him this past week. Please read it, as its simple lessons are as profound as anything I've ever written on my blog.

Hey Marcus.

I'm super busy today, but I was thinking about you. First off.....THANK YOU!!! We spoke in the fall about [HubSpot](#). Your case study was really important to us signing up for HubSpot. It sold my boss in 15 minutes. We also spoke on the phone for 15 minutes or so and you convinced me that smart people in a blue collar industry can dominate online with the help of HubSpot and a lot of hard work.

HubSpot has been amazing for us. We signed up in October 2010

We had 300 visitors in November. We had 14,000 in April. Our business has basically changed overnight. My boss is AMAZED. We've had to hire new people, buy new truck and machines, etc. It's been a crazy season. I also got promoted to Vice President.

I just looked at your pool website with my SEOMOZ tools. It was showing like 1100 root

domain links, which is amazing!!!! I want help with HubSpot. I trust you.

I am starting a new website for our sister company, <name hidden> Nursery.

Reach out when you can..... Thanks!

Jason

As you might imagine, emails like this get me fired up. What's even better, is that I'm starting to get them *a lot*. The simple fact is [inbound marketing](#) works. Content can change a business forever. And those businesses willing to embrace change will likely dominate their niche because of the antiquated methodologies of their competitors.

But beyond the benefits of content/inbound marketing itself, I was reminded of 3 powerful lessons with this experience:

1. Content Can Change Companies Forever: Just by getting on HubSpot and embracing inbound marketing, this company's website went from 0 to 60 in a matter of no time (or "overnight" as Jason said it). Seriously, going from 300 visits a month to 14k is astonishing, but such is the power of blogging (content) for small business when done right.

2. Content Only Needs One Believer: Granted, it's not always easy to convince one's boss of the merits of social media and content marketing. But nothing happens without the first initial effort. Simply because one man in this company had the guts to put it out there and approach "the boss," every other employee in that company will now be able to feed their families easier and much needed jobs will be given to those persons who have likely been unemployed and struggling to get by for months. If that's not motivating, I don't know what is.

3. Content Leads to Promotions: How do you go from 'fresh out of college' to "Company Vice President?" As Seth Godin would say, you become a heretic. You push the envelope. You challenge the status quo. This is exactly what Jason did in his industry and now his entire life has changed.

Hey Boss, Call Me

For those of you reading this who have a boss with his or her head in the sand, that won't embrace content marketing and social media, do them a favor and have them read this. Then, if they're still not convinced, put them on the phone with me. (No, I'm not kidding.) It's time your business was ushered into the information age—before it's too late.

So as we go about our week my fellow readers, what say ye that we follow the example of Jason? Let's push the status quo. Let's challenge our bosses (or ourselves) to reach new heights of excellence within our company. And more than anything, let's all be a part of what might be the most important business movement in the history of the world.

The Age of Digital Branding and the Power of Perception

I pulled into the gravel parking lot of my swimming pool company this morning and an unexpected thought came to mind— **“Geez this place is pretty ugly.”**

I know, sounds rather rough, doesn't it? But it's true. It's such a plain metal building. No glitz. No pomp. And if you were to drive by it, you probably would not even give it a glance. And you certainly wouldn't know it was the home of the most popular swimming pool website in the world.....

Good-Bye Pretty Buildings, Hello Smart Marketing

As many of you know, about three years ago I completely changed my shift and focus as a business owner. Instead of solely relying on antiquated marketing principles to generate business, I did a 180 and embraced content and inbound marketing. This was easily one of the smartest decisions I've ever made, but it also coincided perfectly with another major shift in my thinking as well.

You see, I used to equate the success of my business with the image people saw on the outside. This image was derived, at least in my mind, from retail stores. There was a time when I honestly thought that if I had really nice stores, this would naturally lead to more profitability and sales. This is also what I was taught when I entered the industry in 2001, which explains why just a few years ago I had one of the nicest retail stores in all of Virginia for swimming pools, offering a full line of game room equipment, pool tables, tanning beds, hot tubs, and much more.

From the outside, the place made quite the impression, but from the inside, it practically crippled the company. Not only did it require a huge amount time, employees, and management to operate such a facility, but it also was, at best, a break-even financially.

Accepting Reality

After having been in this location from 2006-2009, my business partners and I realized a couple

of important realities.

1. Our website, not our stores, created the consumer perception of our company's brand.
2. Old-school retail, in many industries including ours, was a dying business model.

With this realization, we “sold the mills” and got rid of all retail. We also took all of the energies we had been spending on the frivolous minutia of running the store to producing a website that would generate leads and sales through content– and lots of it.

And boy did the strategy pay off in spades.

Customers Don't Care About Your 'Stuff'

My pool company has gotten more leads in the past month than at any other time in our history. These leads have translated into sales– LOTS of sales. And do you know how many people have commented or asked about our buildings/offices/retail stores?

If you answered ZERO, you were right.

At the same time though, guess how many of these clients have talked about our company's website– and the feeling, or “perception,” they got from all of the information they found therein?

If you answered ALL of them, you're right again.

Switching gears for a second, most of you know that I do a lot of web coaching, speaking, traveling, and consulting these days for other businesses, some of which are multi-million dollar companies. I don't mention this to brag, as it's nothing special, but I just want to stress this critical point again:

How many clients have asked me about where I run my business from or what my office looks like?

Again, you already know the answer. **None of them.**

They don't care that I work out of my home. They don't care that when I'm talking to them on the phone, I'm likely wearing a t-shirt with my bare feet propped up on the desk.

Nope, all they care about is what they see on that dang screen.....

Perception Based on the Digital Realm

We live in a time folks where the perception others will have of us has nothing to do with 'stuff.' It's has nothing really to do with what they see in the real world, but everything they *perceive* from the digital realm.

So if you, as a business owner and entrepreneur, truly want to taste success, start thinking day and night about your digital brand and perception. How do you come across to others online? Are you viewed as a thought leader? Do you have a community that further validates your "expert" claims? Are you producing the content that's required to be a mover and a shaker in your industry or niche?

These questions and many others just like them need to be clearly understood if you want to be successful. And it's not a one-time thing either. It's a subject of utmost importance until the day your business and brand no longer exist.

Let-It-Go

My point? If there is anything distracting you and your business from online greatness, drop it. Just let it go. I've been asked many times why I let go of my swimming pool stores. Many people thought it was a dumb idea and would hurt my image. But what they don't understand is I know who I am, and I know how my customers make their judgments about me, and it sure as heck isn't based upon those yellow metal walls. Nope, it's all about the little digits on the screen, and when it comes to that screen, I'm going to make sure the impression is a lasting one.

Forgetting Labels: My Crazy Journey from a "Pool Guy" to Web App Developer

We all label ourselves. I do. You do. It's just what we do.

I used to be a “pool guy.” That’s what kids called me when they opened the door and screamed to their parents I had arrived. Yeah, they couldn’t wait for “pool guy” to show up. Kids aren’t dumb. They know commerce from an early age, and the “pool guy” at the door was a very, very good sign.

Heck, if I had a dollar for every time someone has called me ‘pool guy’ in the last 10 years I’d be able to write a book called “The 4 *Minute* Work Week.”

It Ain’t My Thing

Technology has never really been my thing. I spent hours and hours about 7 years ago trying to learn how to design a simple webpage. But I stunk at it. In fact, computers have kicked my butt since day 1, even that stupid Commodore 64 over 25 years ago.

I don’t know why this has been the case, but that’s just the way it has been.

In late 2008, when I realized that the whole world of business and marketing would soon be strictly an online venture, I was desperate to understand web design, at least somewhat.

So I again gave it a go. Dreamweaver was the task this time.

But I failed, bad. It was like learning Chinese.

Thank You Captain CMS

About 6 months later, I stumbled upon [HubSpot](#) and their CMS and my whole world changed. For the first time, I started seeing that technology was catching up with dummies like me. Content Management Systems were the wave of the future. Average Jane and Joe, without being techie/coder types could finally be their own webmaster with just a little bit of practice.

It was one of the most exciting times of my life, without question.

In fact, it was like I had been an artist for years, with a canvas in front of me, yet no brush to work my magic.

With the advent of web design for dummies, I finally had my brush. I could now create.

And create I did.

Change Begins

Within a matter of 12 months, my [swimming pool company's website](#) went from 20 pages to about 400. Our web marketing began to dominate its industry. Business boomed.

And as for me, I was like a kid in a candy shop. Looking at my analytics each day was thrilling. Watching that snowball grow from a small flake to a huge mass, rolling down a mountain and growing by the second, was simply exhilarating.

Despite my “technological deficiencies,” I now saw myself differently, and this blog became an extension of that newfound vision.

And with it, the “pool guy” started become the “inbound marketing guy.”

In a matter of months, one label was shed, another was born.

The Magic of Content ‘Tipping Points’

Then came the beginning of 2011. One night, as I was happily sitting at my kitchen table and comparing all of my leads vs. leads-turned-customers from 2010, an epiphany hit me like a ton of bricks.

To make a long story short, I noticed a simple pattern, and it was this:

If I could get a lead (someone that filled out a form on my website) to **view at least 30 pages of my website**, I would close said lead about 80% of the time assuming I went out on a sales appointment.

Although these numbers may sound insignificant to most of you, to me it was groundbreaking, as the swimming pool industry average is around 15%.

Once I knew that 30 page views was a magic number, or **content “tipping point,”** I developed my wholesales process around this simple truth.

In other words, I worked doggedly to make sure prospects read 30 pages of our site *before* they

had a sales appointment. And what were the results?

Well, to state it briefly, 2011 has been far and away our best year ever as a swimming pool company. We've broken all records in sales, closing rates, profits, etc. We even are booked-out until the beginning of 2012 with pools to install. It's amazing. And it all came down to a simple "tipping point."

A Simple Idea

When I realized the power of content tipping points, I started to teach this principle wherever I could. Soon, I found my hypothesis was correct—every industry, niche, and product has a content tipping point (actually, there are multiple, but that's for another day). Companies just need to figure theirs out and then they can be off to the races.

Once, when I was presenting this idea to a group of people at HubSpot, one of their great employees, [Mark Kilens](#), made a simple yet forehead-slapping statement to me:

"You know Marcus, this would really make for a great app."

And that's when my brain started turning. "My goodness, I could create an app that would tell companies their content tipping points!"

Being a HubSpot client and coach, I decided to use their platform as my first testing ground. Within days, I hired a developer, gave him the vision, and we were off.

Weeks later, the HubSpot ' [Tipping Point App](#) ' was born.

And then I gave it away to their 5000+ customers, for FREE.

Some folks thought I was nuts for not charging for such a tool, but I didn't care. This app for me was like Franklin's lightning rod—a gift to society.

Now granted, my little app is in its initial phases. It will be further developed, added to, and then rolled out to other platforms (like WordPress hopefully).

But for now, I'll just enjoy a new label: **Marcus Sheridan, Web App Developer**

Our Potential is Boundless

The older I get, the more I realize that we have no clue as to our potential. We think we're not "meant" to do certain things. We feel we weren't dealt the right cards to be this or that.

What a bunch of pooh.

Not to be cliché, but I honestly believe our potential is boundless. Why do we self-impose limits? Why must we stop short of the gifts and talents that are deep within each and every one of us?

Fact is, there's no reason why, none at all.

I'm done with the labels. I see my potential as unlimited. And I'm sure as heck not afraid to admit that to myself. It's there, so why not embrace it, right?

But I'm not special. You and I were created by the same hands. We've all got magic within. Now let's go find it, shall we?

Are Some Industries Just Too 'Boring' to Blog About?

In a recent video interview with my friend **Srini** from [Skool of Life](#) and BlogcastFM, I was reminded of a question that I've been asked again and again over the past 2 years but has honestly never made much sense to me. It goes a little like this:

Marcus, how did you do so well blogging about an industry (swimming pools) that is, let's face it, kind of boring, and really not at all sexy?

Ahh yes, the "sexy" myth we hear so much of when it comes to blogging and content marketing. But I understand the question, as it was a good one by Srini, because so many people are thinking the same thing when it comes to their niche, industry, or product. In fact, I'd venture to say I've heard a derivative of the following statement at least 50 times:

"I'm in a boring field Marcus, this blogging stuff isn't going to work."

Alas, how very misguided you are my friend.

Fact is, every, and I really do mean EVERY, industry can be sexy.

How is it possible? Let' me cut to the chase: Not making a huge mistake when buying a product is sexy. Purchasing an item or service without stress is sexy. Saving \$10,000 is sexy. Saving \$1.00 is sexy.

Catch my drift?

People search all day online to save \$5 on a book they could have bought from Amazon in 60 seconds.

And when they do it, they go and brag to their friends and family.

Don't ask me why this is the way that it is, because I can't explain the logic, it's just the truth. So don't fall into the trap of thinking your industry, product, or niche is boring; as there are plenty of people just waiting to be fed great information and be taught from someone who actually cares about their well-being and wallet.

10 Ways to Convince Your CEO and Management Team to Embrace Social Media

We have a serious problem my friends raging in businesses, small and large, across the world—**Social Media Buy-In from management.**

Never was this so apparent than when I spoke in Toronto this past week at the [MeshMarketing](#) conference and among the many emails I received, these two really struck a chord:

Hi Marcus,

It was great meeting you at Meshmarketing yesterday. My biggest struggle with content marketing is getting buy in from my senior management. I've been pitching this idea at them religiously for a year now but they keep countering that we don't have the time, the resources, enough subject material, etc. I am seriously looking forward to hitting them with all the new stuff I'll be learning from you.

Stay awesome!

Dorothy

Or this one from Alice:

..... I work for a very small company led by a CEO that refuses to see the light when it comes to ANY marketing strategy. I am about to pull my hair out. I came on board about 4 months ago, thinking they were open to new ideas. Nope. Not a one. Doesn't believe in social media – claims Twitter is a “lie” and that there's no one really listening. Doesn't let any content hit the website unless it's been sanitized to look like a college brochure. Doesn't force the sales guy (yes, only one) to get on board with me.....in short, this is a place I'm looking to get out of as soon as I can. This (marketing) is a brave new world that I came back to and I want to be a part of it. So if THIS place is destined for the slag-heap, I don't intent to go down with it. The saddest thing of all? I'm a great writer, if I do say so myself. I've written everything from plays and short stories to IBM training classes and technical case studies. Ah well. What was that you said about leading a horse to water? They will probably never get it.

Alice

So there you have it. We have a management buy-in problem with respect to social media and inbound marketing, and it's happening everywhere. It might even be happening in your office. Alas, what is the solution to dealing with antiquated business leaders who simply 'don't get it'? Great question. Hopefully the following suggestions will be exactly what you're looking for:

10 Ways You Can Convince Your CEO and Management Team to Embrace Social Media

1. Show them competitor keyword phrases

Here is the key to 'motivating' CEOs, especially when they're a hard-headed and prideful male—Take advantage of their competitive nature. Personally, I've never known a CEO/owner of a company that wasn't a little bit competitive. With this being the case, it's time to allow the competition to do the convincing for you.

For example, a great idea is to find a competitor who has done well with ranking for certain keyword phrases in your niche. Once you've identified 5 such phrases that your competitor ranks high for, and your company doesn't, simply walk into your boss' office and ask him/her if he has a minute to look at what your prospects are finding when they research online.

Next, ask him to type in each phrase, and allow him to see that the competition is showing up while he is not. Go through all 5 phrases slowly, and make him search each one closely.

I can assure you by the 5th phrase and search, your boss will likely be ready to punch his desk, and might just be willing to give you what you're looking for.

2. Show them competitors/peers who have been involved in case studies

Every industry has case studies of people who have crushed it online. Heck, my pool company has been featured in at least 10 different online publications. If you want to see an example of many different niches, see [HubSpot's case studies](#), where you'll find an incredible range of business types.

Again, management and CEOs are competitive by nature. Allow this to work in your favor by showing how your company is an online 'slacker' compared to these others that are getting so much Internet attention.

3. Show them general competitive stats

I love this one. HubSpot is especially good at it, as it allows me to compare my website with the website of many others. In fact, check out this awesome screenshot:

Website	Website Grade	mozRank	Traffic Rank	Indexed Pages	Linking Domains	Blog Grade	Facebook Fans	Twitter Followers
www.riverpoolsandspas.com	97	5.4	258,240	848	909	59	N/A	1,089
www.waterworldpools.com	72	5.0	2,114,380	182	22	Not Graded	214	N/A
www.vikingpools.net	90	5.1	891,760	251	213	49	908	N/A
www.trilogypools.com	94	5.0	1,133,980	194	87	53	0	1,919
www.sanjuanpools.com	92	5.4	1,511,107	475	389	Not Graded	0	N/A
www.leisurepoolsusa.com	93	5.2	1,134,509	441	1,677	59	N/A	N/A
www.sunpools.com	87	4.7	3,486,599	307	42	Not Graded	N/A	N/A
www.alohafiberglasspools.com	84	4.6	2,481,473	14	64	59	N/A	N/A

With certain analytic tools like this one from HubSpot, you can easily compare your company website with that of another.

By seeing the various ways your company stacks up against others, there is a very good chance you'll stir some serious emotions within the management team.

4. Analyze with marketing the amount of money that has been spent on other advertising and marketing tactics.

This one takes a little work but is incredibly effective. It's actually pretty shocking the fact that many CEOs have little to no idea just how much they spend on advertising each year. And when you compare that steep amount with what they *could* be spending (or not spending) on social media, it suddenly appears more enticing.

As an example of such stats, in 2007 my swimming pool company spent about \$250,000 in advertising to achieve a gross sales total of about \$4,000,000. This year, in 2011, we'll spend \$18,000 and reach a gross sales of roughly \$5,000,000. (Heck, you can just show your boss that number and then have him call me if you'd like)

5. Analyze where sales have come from specifically with all other advertising. Is it quantifiable?

This one is very similar to #4 but the fact is, old-school marketing stinks in terms of its ability to be measured and quantified. Unlike social media, blogging, and inbound marketing that can track specific numbers of leads and sales, most outbound marketing methods have a very, very cloudy Return-On-Investment (ROI).

If a CEO realizes that he can finally start to track real numbers, he may just get excited enough to give you a green light.

7. Show real-time conversations happening online about your product.

Just as Alice's boss in the opening thought Twitter was "a lie," it's possible to show real-time mentions of products and services happening all over the world, as well as businesses interacting with those real-time mentions.

8. Survey existing customers/previous leads

Have you ever surveyed your existing customer base and asked them if they would appreciate an educational/how-to blog explaining your products and/or services? Or even better, what would happen if you surveyed your leads that didn't convert into customers and asked them if your lack of a powerful web presence had any effect on their decision not to choose your company? If but one person says they chose one of your competitors because of their website/social media interaction, I can guarantee you'll then be in business.

9. HubSpot's Webgrader

HubSpot's [website grader tool](#) was what really started it all for me in March of 2009 when I scored a whopping 17 out of 100 for my company's website. So mad was I at this low score that I just had to see it rise.

So do yourself a favor and take a moment to try this tool out and if the score isn't a 'passing' grade, print that baby out and neatly set it on your boss' desk.

10. Utilize the Power of Video

Remember, **over 60% of all people are visual learners**, and your CEO or management team might fall into this category. If your competitors are making great videos, make sure your boss sees them. Also, take advantage of educational videos that teach proper marketing concepts. As an example, just last week I had a client tell me her boss gave her the green light to use my services when he was forced to watch my "[Vision of Inbound Marketing](#)" Video. (Sweet!)

So there you have it folks, 10 ways you can attempt to bring your CEO and management team into the 21st century and embrace the social media marketing principles that you already know to be true.

It is my hope that if you're struggling like Dorothy and Alice you'll take a moment to see if some of these actions work. And if all else fails, just tell them to call The Sales Lion, and he'll get 'em straight.

Chapter 2: No Excuses

Husband, Father, Blogger, Business Owner: A Sales Lion Close-Up



Larsen, Dad, and 'Pink'

Monday February 21st 2011

7:30am—As I feel a tiny set of fingers tickling the bottom of my feet this morning, my eyes begin to open and a smile immediately comes to my face. Larsen, my 4-year-old daughter, has taken it upon herself to wake up “Daddy” this morning, just as she always does about this time. I’m feeling really good today though. Yesterday, like most Sundays, I caught a nap, and today I arise invigorated, just knowing that everything on this day is going to fall into place. For some reason, I can’t help but to smile.

8:15am—I skipped breakfast this morning. I’ve got writing on the brain instead. A post is due and I can see it already written in my head. I’m going to write today about an experience I had on a sales appointment Friday. This [article](#) will be fun.

8:40am—Article is done. Wow, that was fast. Yeah, it really is going to be a good day. A few more minutes to get this puppy up on WordPress and we’ll see if she’s got legs. Blog day is always fun. Never quite sure of the reaction, but I feel good about this one.

9:15am—“Publish” button has been hit.....Need to tackle a few emails for my swimming pool company before writing my next article this morning.

9:40am—Wow I'm feeling stoked to write an article that has been building up within me for quite some time. Despite the fact that I run the most popular swimming pool educational blog in the world right now, none of the manufacturers/vendors in the industry want to offer content for guest posts. I've offered and almost all have said no. I want to give them a free platform to spread the word yet their minds and marketing methodologies are so antiquated that I've been stonewalled. Well enough is enough. Time to call 'em out. The article will be called, "[There is Something Very, Very Wrong with the Swimming Pool Industry](#)." I think it's going to cause a stir, but that's OK, it needs to be said, and it won't be the first time the status quo and I will buttheads.

10:05am—850 words later and she's done.....and I really like this article. It just feels right. I'm going to throw it up on my blog, which is a HubSpot platform, and see if she's got legs.....TSL article is already getting comments. [Patricia](#) is the first to jump in. What a great lady she is. I like her a lot. [Joe](#) and [Robert](#) quickly throw in their thoughts as well. Looks like this article might do well. I'm excited.....and still smiling.

11:15am—Back upstairs to grab a bite. My kids and I chat and play a little. I eat fast, but that's me. I hate wasting time on food, especially on a day like this when I'm so excited as to the possibilities.

11:45am—Time to head to the office building of my swimming pool company. As I'm walking to my car, I look out and see Larsen on her swing. Alone. I better take a minute and give a few pushes before I leave. She needs to know I care.

12:30pm—At the office. I've got some new employees to meet today as pool season is about to explode yet again. I don't come here much anymore. My business partner Jim handles the day-to-day for our company. At this point I'm either selling or producing content. It allows me to work at home quite a bit. The office is a cage for me at this point in my life. Soon, I will hire a full-time sales person and my duties will almost be completely filled, thus allowing me to further focus on other areas of my life. Although River Pools has been great to me, this stallion is ready to run.....

3:00pm—After following up with the weekend leads from our website I've decided to spend about an hour or so floating around the blogosphere. My first stop is Ingrid's blog, [NittyGriddy](#). Man this girl is good. Really good. She has posted a "[weekly roundup](#)" of great articles from last week and included [my fun little spat](#) with [Mark Harai](#) on avatars. That's awesome. So nice to be recognized. It's weird how these types of mentions happen all the time these days, especially considering for the first year of my blog I could only hear the crickets. Funny how quickly times can change.

6:00pm—Still sitting here. Everyone has left the office and it's about time I started to head home as well. I'm hungry. For some weird reason I want McDonald's French fries. Hmm, that's weird, I don't know when was the last time I actually had the urge to eat *anything* from

McDonald's.

6:30pm—Sitting in McD's eating French fries and their new oatmeal. Don't ask me why. I'm still trying to figure it out myself.

7:30pm—Home with the fam. Time to read some books and wrestle with the kids, depending on who's climbing up my back. I enjoy this part of the night, and their smiles indicate likewise.

8:00pm—Notice an email on my blackberry. It's Jk from [Hustler's Notebook](#). Despite also leaving a comment on today's post, he has taken a moment to privately tell me he thinks I should write a book about the ideas I'm teaching on TSL. I can't believe how kind and thoughtful the guy is. Unbelievable.

8:30pm—Kids are now in bed. My wife Nikki and I are on the couch talking while the baby, "Pink" as we call her, rests on Mommy's lap while eating. This is our special time together each night. No distractions. Just light conversation and simple observations of our newest child while whispering on the couch. The lights are now off in the house. Peace resides.

9:30pm—I've just started my workout downstairs after saying goodnight to my dear wife. Just like every night at this time, I'll be on the elliptical for the next hour. This is also my time to watch TV while working out. Thank goodness for TiVo.

10:40pm—Elliptical done, now I'm in the sauna. 180 degrees in here with Bach playing in the background. This is my spiritual and meditative time of the day. It's great.

11:15pm—Feeling refreshed again. Ready to catch my second wind. I'm debating over whether to write blog articles for my real estate business, write a guest post for another popular blog, or answer an interview request from another blogger.

12:00am—Chose the interview first. I'd been putting the guy off. It took a little time to answer his questions but it was fun. Now time for the guest post.

1:00am—Guest post written. That's a relief. My eyes are now hurting. Real Estate articles will have to wait till tomorrow.

1:30am—Slowly tip-toe in bed. While I lay here I take a deep breath. One in. One out. I'll be asleep in 30seconds. It was a good day. And I'm still smiling.

10 Lame Excuses NOT to have a Business Blog Now

Warning, this is a vent blog directed towards business owners and entrepreneurs, so if you're not up for a little venting, you may want to continue on with your day.....But if you're like me and frustrated to see the awesome benefits of content marketing and blogging that is available to every business owner in the world only to have a very, very small percentage take advantage of the beautiful medium, then keep reading.

I've recently started doing more and more consulting with small businesses. I love helping people succeed, so such a business is only a natural result of these circumstances. But I'm finding the more I discuss the power of blogging and content marketing with other businesses, the more I'm blown away with lame and down-right silly excuses as to why these men and women are not jumping on the train of Web 2.0 and giving their customers what they are truly looking for.

So in this little post, I decided to take a break from trying to convince small business owners across the globe to begin to embrace information marketing. Instead, I'm going to talk about some of the bogus excuses I'm hearing more and more these days from small biz owners and entrepreneurs everywhere.

My company's website does not currently have a blog because.....

I'm just not good at writing.

You're not good at writing huh? Well tell me, are you good at talking? In other words, are you able to talk to customers about your services and products? I'd be willing to bet you are which is why I'd be willing to bet you could also blog if you only believed in yourself. Remember though, you do not have to blog alone. Do you have a spouse or a friend that could help and edit? How about a co-worker?

Frankly, I'm just tired of people blaming their writing skills for their lack of content marketing. It's lame and just like any other skill, we get better at it the more we do it. But it starts with an "I can" versus an "I can't," that much I'm sure of.

I don't have the time.

Out of time are you? You mean to tell me that you don't have 2-3 hours a week to produce 1-2

articles about a subject in your field?? C'mon, that's crapola and we both know it. Have you watched a TV show this week? If your answer is "yes" then you're lying and do have the time.

We've all heard it before—*Everyone has enough time to do the things they want to do*. We all prioritize the events and activities of our lives that are most important. Instead of saying "I just don't have the time" you may as well just be honest with yourself and say "I just don't really care."

No one in my industry reads blogs.

No one? Really? So are you telling me that not a single person in your industry that's looking for your service or product doesn't have questions before they buy? Are you inferring that every consumer in your industry is a natural expert and is born knowing everything about your business? Sure.....gotcha.

I don't have anything to blog about.

Well I guess you don't have a product then either, do you? Heck, you don't even have a business, so why don't you just close the doors and move on to your next successful endeavor considering you picked the only industry in the world that is void of any and all information?

In other words, start thinking like a consumer; stop thinking like a business owner.

Blogging costs too much money.

You're right. I mean, considering starting a blog takes about \$20 and a few hours of time a week, yeah, sounds incredibly expensive to me. I guess that's why you're still spending \$800 a month to have a big ad that no one reads in the Yellow Pages, right?

Blogging Doesn't Work.

Yeah, and neither does the sun. Good grief, the idea that blogging doesn't work, in 2010, is a sign of delirium. My blog at River Pools saved me over \$6,000 last month in free searches that I would have normally paid for had I been completely Pay Per Click/Adwords dependent. I don't know about you, but to me that's a lot of money.

Blogging isn't for smaller, local businesses.

Again, utter near sightedness and lunacy. Blogging is definitively the best tool (other than Google local business/search) to optimize one's website for local search phrases. Considering that every business provides services in at least one town or city, local blog optimization is crucial.

We've been doing it this way for years.

Yeah, that's exactly what Henry Ford said.....and JC Penny's.....and K-Mart.....and every other business that was at one time extremely successful but has now gone the way of the dinosaur.

Newsflash: **Just because it worked yesterday doesn't mean it's going to work today.**

I'm just not web-savvy.

Well then get web-savvy—at least enough to be able to whip up a document in Word and paste it on a blogging platform. In 2010, not being web savvy is no longer a thing to brag about for a business owner. In fact, it's embarrassing.

I can say this because it wasn't too long ago that I was clueless when it came to the web and computers. That is until I got mad at myself enough to do something about it. Any person, no matter what the age or background, can become comfortable and knowledgeable with computers, websites, and blogging within only a few months time if they'll only dedicate a few hours a week to learning and experimenting with technology.

I don't know where to begin.

I'm biased, but this blog is a darn good place to start. Then I'd go over to [HubSpot](#) and check out their incredible educational tools. Those guys are awesome and they really get the “big” picture.

Once you're ready to start your blog, write down the 20 top questions you get from consumers. These questions will be the titles of your first 20 blog articles. Now start writing.

Why “I’m not a Computer Guy” is the Lazest Excuse in the World for Business Owners

“I didn’t grow up around computers.”

“Electronics just aren’t my thing.”

“This dog is way too old to learn that computer stuff.”

As you may have guessed, these are just a few of the statements I’ve heard recently upon discussing with business owners their web marketing and Internet strategies. In fact, I’ve heard so many similar excuses from business owners lately that I couldn’t contain myself any longer and just had to write this article.

Excuses, Excuses

Look, this may come across as a little strong or rude, but if you’ve ever used one of the excuses above (or one similar), please stop lying to yourself. Whatever reason you have for not taking control of your company’s web destiny is a sad facade. How can I say that? Well, because there are thousands of people just like you that have overcome these “issues.”

I’ve said it before and I’m sure I’ll say it another 1000times—I used to be a complete and total web dufus. I didn’t grow up around computers. Electronics (just ask anyone that knows me) have never been my thing.

Heck, in the late 90’s when computers and email were just blowing up I was living in Chile for two years where I was lucky to even find a phone, much less a computer. By the time I got back to the states, I was 22 years old and it appeared that technology had literally left me behind. In the course of being gone 2 short years the information age had advanced about 20.

It was during this time period that I started to realize I was in trouble. As a junior in college, I couldn’t even type on a computer without looking down at the keypad for every letter. Just trying to type up a 500 word “essay” took me about 30 minutes, even after I’d written it down on paper first. Yep, I was in a sad state, and I honestly believed that working with computers was the one job I was clearly destined *not* to do.

A New Business and No Skills

When I was 23 I opened up a rinky-dink swimming pool company with my two business

partners, Jim and Jason. We were good friends, had common values, and also shared one incredible flaw: Our computer skills amounted to that of a 10 year old in today's world.

About 3 years into ownership, right around 2003 or so, I realized that those things called “websites” were becoming more and more important. As a struggling pool guy looking to do anything to better our marketing and make more sales, I decided I'd learn web design myself. Needless to say, after about a week of utter confusion and failure, I remembered who I was—the ‘Tech Dufus’ahh, yes, how could I have forgotten???

So we got a webmaster. He set our site up but shortly thereafter I started bugging him. Every time I looked at our site I got ideas. I wanted to add things. I wanted to make announcements. I wanted to teach consumers. I wanted to do more and more and more.....

Despite the best efforts of my webmaster, I was deeply distraught. I literally felt the world passing me by and all I could think about were my “limitations.” “I'm not good at computers,” were my thoughts day in and day out.

Around 2008 I approached my webmaster and asked him to teach me Dreamweaver. I learned a little, but again, it was mostly a failure. I'd spend hours trying to understand simple processes that would take a “tech guy” two minutes to understand and fix.

A New Beginning

Finally, in early 2009, I discovered [HubSpot](#), inbound marketing, and my life quickly began to change. Gone were the limitations. Gone were the bottlenecks. I could now design my own website, blog, and add content without being a ‘techie’Very, very cool.

So I threw myself in. I watched all the videos. I read the books. I bought eBooks. And I started blogging.....and blogging.....and blogging (and even learned to type pretty darn fast).

Our pool company exploded. As our creative juices went wild and as all 3 of us began to see technology in a whole new light, everything changed for the better. Sales became easier and more frequent. Despite the economy and all its hardships, our business and financial lives were literally saved because we kept trying, kept looking for anything that would help us “non-techies.”

Fast forward to 2010. Today I have one of the country's most successful pool companies and I also own a thriving Web Coaching Company with my business partner Jason. In a matter of 2

years I've literally gone from dufus to paid speaker, consultant, and coach.....What 's even better is that I'm pretty dang good.

As I write these words I can't believe it myself. It's crazy, but it's true.

Yes You Can

I hope you don't think my goal here is to brag about my accomplishments. I only give this time line because I want all you "non-techie" business owners out there to know **there is hope**. That's right, *you* can be a computer guy. *You* can learn web design because of the simple content management systems that are available for everyone, with or with code knowledge.

Aren't you tired of the frustration that comes with total dependency on others for your website and digital marketing? I know, I know, you may sit there and tell everyone, "I don't want to be a computer guy." But in reality, **you do**. We all do. As business owners, we all want to feel as if we are in control of our destinies.

So please don't kid yourself any longer. Embrace the possibilities. Believe it can be done. And if you need some direction, there are a million people on line just like me who are willing to get your started. So giddy-up cowboy, the time to learn to ride is now.

How to Turn Your Company Into a Content Creation Machine

I was planning on writing a different post this evening but I was so moved by a telephone conversation I had today with a business owner that I just had to address this incredibly important subject, which is a growing problem for more and more businesses around the globe. Here is the conversation (For the sake of ease, we'll call the business owner "John"):

Me: OK John, so you're getting on board with this whole idea of inbound marketing. Great. That's exciting. Tell me, do you already have a blog?

John: No, but that is something we're looking in to.

Me: Once you start blogging, who do you see as the people that are going to be producing content?

John: What do you mean by producing content?

Me: I mean any person that produces any text, video, photos, etc. that says anything about your product or services.

John: Well, I guess that would be my head of marketing.....and myself.....and maybe another person. That being said, we are a little worried about blogging because we only have about 5 hours a week to dedicate to this.

Me: Exactly how many employees do you have working for you John?

John: About 400

Me:(doing a double flinch on my end) 400??

John: Yes, 400, spread around the globe.

Me: (short pause as I slap my forehead in disbelief) John, you're going about this all the wrong.

John: What do you mean Marcus?

Me: Well, tell me this, how many people work in your sales department?

John: About 16 or so.

Me: OK, and let me ask you one other question, and this is the important one—How many people in your company have ever answered any question at all about your product or services?

John: (thinking for a second) Well, I guess all 400 have.

Me: John, don't you see where I'm going with this? What would happen if you asked every employee in your company to write just one blog article a year?

John: Wow, I never looked at it like that.....

Creating a Culture of Education

Here's the thing folks—John is a very, very smart guy. Just talking with him on the phone I

could tell that I'd never want to compete against him in Jeopardy. Notwithstanding, John has yet to grasp the concept of creating a culture of education within a company.

One of the biggest problems businesses have is that they are way too reliant on a very, very small percentage of their employees to actually produce content. This, my friends, is bonkers. It makes no sense.

A guy like John, who is already equipped with 400 employees (a small army), was worried that he simply *didn't have enough time* to produce content. Are you kidding me?!! In reality, the biggest problem John should have is managing the river of content that flows into him (or his marketing dept.) from the mountain of employees who are all excited to be a part of the company's content marketing revolution.

Big or Small, the Same Rules Apply

I hope you're catching the vision with me here. Let me give you another example on a smaller scale. My [swimming pool company](#) has about 15 employees. This year, we've given every person that works in the field a digital camera so that they can take pics of the various stages of every pool install we do. I also have my service guys equipped with flip cameras so they can record simple "how to" videos on basic pool maintenance. Yes, I'm still producing content as I've always done but now that I've got so many others on my "team" the idea of new "stuff" has gotten much, much easier.

Also, another huge benefit of involving as many employees as possible is the fact the employees get excited and take more of an "ownership" approach to their job because they are making a difference by teaching others (literally around the world) about what it is they do. Simply put, most employees throughout the world are just dying to share their talents and knowledge with others, and there is no better means to support and facilitate this than by allowing them to produce content—in any form that may provide value to consumers.

So that's my challenge to you folks. If you own a business, the time has come to start leveraging the power and skills of your employees. Embrace a culture of education from top to bottom. **Let every member of the team carry the ball.** By so doing, I can assure you that not only will your workload go down while employee moral goes up, but your company will also turn into a content producing machine, putting yourself in position to dominate your niche for many years to come.

Big Business, Content Marketing, and the Stupid Reasons We Choose Not to Blog

I had a most disturbing/depressing conversation with a pretty massive home-building company the other day. They had contacted me to discuss their current marketing strategy and within a few minutes of analyzing their business, it was obvious they had no concept of how to integrate content/inbound marketing into the mix. Thus, it was my job to present to them the vision of what they could do, simply through a company blog, to generate incredible traffic, leads, and sales.

The power behind the plan was that they would be able to produce, through their employee base that is well into the hundreds, hoards of content (blog articles and such), and in-turn they would not be so dependent on their **\$1,000,000+** Pay Per Click marketing campaign to generate leads.

Essentially, by hiring a single CCO (chief content officer) at less than 100k a year, they would save 10 times that once the content started working it's magic, and the number and quality of the leads that would come through such a campaign would be exponential.

Excuses, Excuses

But here's the part that really stinks. The company, instead of focusing on what could and would be the result of an amazing content marketing campaign, instead only focused on the perceived "difficulties" and obstacles that would come with such a strategy: What if the information in a blog article isn't accurate from one state to the next? How would we have time to manage such a thing? Most of our sales people don't write well. What if our base of dealers doesn't agree on all our content? And on and on and on.

So instead of thinking about the thousands and thousands of consumers that are on Google right now, looking for a trusted source to give them great education through information, they are instead worried about red tape. Minutia. Frivolous details that don't mean a dang thing.

To the Death of Red Tape!

Here is the deal folks: Companies that are crushing it online never talk about time, what ifs, and the thousands of other "concerns" that can be imagined. They don't play around with silly red tape and compare content marketing to building the Great Wall of China or putting a man on the moon. Nope, they see it as **everything** within their business— the lifeblood of all if you will. And because of that, there's never an excuse as to why they can't produce a great blog, website, etc.

But there is one other thing about this company mentioned above. Not only are they spending over 1 million in PPC, but they are also going through an entire web revamping so as to ease site navigation and conversions. This revamping, although a great need, is a classic example of “putting the cart before the horse.” Instead of worrying about driving traffic to their site and inducing consumer trust through content, they’re putting all their chips into what’s supposed to happen *after* the prospect has visited the site and started the learning process. Can you see just how off this methodology is?

The Wrong Way

But, truth be told, this company is like thousands of others out there right now– recognizing the need for a much better website, but going about the marketing process all the wrong way. And because of this, the results will be slim, and some other “upstart” that doesn’t bother worrying about reasons “not” to blog will throw themselves headlong into the content marketing process, ultimately passing “the big boys” in their industry by, and leaving them to scratch their heads as to how it happened. If there ever was such a thing as a modern day “David vs Goliath,” this is it.

Note*:** [John Sherry](#) wrote such an amazing comment below I’ve decided to add it into the main part of this article, as it’s simply too good for some not to read it:

I’ll give you why Marcus -because they won’t embrace today, to move on and get with the world and where it’s at. They fear the new and evolving and fight to keep things as they used to be, the familiar and glory days when they did well in their market. Companies who won’t grow won’t develop like an under achieving child at school.

You can lead a horse to water, a child to a book, and a company to blogging, but you can’t make it realize that its future depends on it until it’s too late or till everyone else is at the party and they aren’t. Listen to their language and you’ll hear an “in-my-day-mentality”.....plus the cobwebs around their outlook. These aren’t the mover and shakers, they’re the dead and dying and, sadly, there’s more and more businesses these days without a pulse.

So my question to you Mr. Big Business is when are you going to stop looking for excuses not to be great? When are you going to embrace the power of education-based marketing and give your customers what they’re looking for? Trust me, if you were able to count the (in this case) **millions of dollars** in additional sales and savings such a campaign would lead to, excuses wouldn’t be in your vocabulary. I can assure you the minute you do make this shift, everything within your company will change in amazing ways.

The Real Reason You Don't Have the Time for Blogging and Content Marketing

Business Owner: Hey Marcus, how are you?

Me: Great, just sitting here finishing up a blog article I just wrote.

Business Owner: Dang man, I wish I had the time you had to blog. I'd love to blog. I've got tons of ideas and things to say, but I just don't have the time.

Me: (Debating on whether to be honest or just roll with it.....) Yeah, I know what you mean.

This was a brief conversation I had just a few days ago with someone that had called me for some general advice. I mention it here because I've had almost this exact same conversation at least 100 times (no exaggeration) this year alone with other business owners. Yep, when it comes down to it, there is a problem in the world, and I believe the moment has arrived that we all accept this truism and move on from it:

There Just Isn't Enough Time For Anyone To Blog. No Time For Content Marketing. No Time For Video Marketing. No Time. No Time. No Time.

Seriously, I'm blown away how often I hear this talk about *time* and how it relates to proper marketing for a small business. One of these days someone is going to tell me how they "*don't have the time*" and all of the sudden I'm going to lose my mind and say something to the effect of:

It's not that you don't have the time. You don't care. And you don't care because you don't get it. And you don't get it because you don't see the big picture. You have the time to hire employees to work for you. You have the time to hire a book keeper. You have the time to blow money on antiquated advertising mediums that don't work any longer. Yet you don't have the time for blogging. You don't have the time to embrace change and usher your business into the "educational age." No, when it comes down to it, you don't have time to for greatness.....You're too stuck on staying average with the rest of the masses.

OK, so there it was. Now I feel better. Glad I got that off my chest.

Look, I know blogging, especially as a business owner, can be tough when you're getting pulled in 50 different directions. But the concept of proper content creation for a business is so important in this information and consumer education age that businesses can't ignore it, which is why you need to accept this reality.

Either you take care of your content marketing, or you hire someone to do it for you.

As I mentioned above, treat it like doing the books for your business. At this point, all businesses realize that they have to take care of their books. There is no way around their accounting. This means that business owners either do it themselves or they hire someone who can. But by no means do they not take care of their company's accounting, otherwise they'll be shut down and go to jail.....which makes the pain of actually getting the books done worth the end result.

Although I would like to think that the fear of failure and future pain isn't the root of all content marketing and blogging for a business, if it's the only thing that motivates a business owner to get started on the right path, then so be it.

But for the love of Pete, please stop telling yourself you don't have the time. Not to sound conceited here, but if someone were to actually follow me around for a week and see how I'm usually writing my next article when the rest of the world is asleep, or when I'm in a sitting in my car in a parking lot and slapping away at the keys because I have 30 minutes in between appointments, then all the sudden they'll start to realize what it means to be truly dedicated to blogging, or as I prefer to put it—creating a culture of education within your business.

Now go make the time. Do the right thing. Plow forward and don't look back. Just have the faith that the work will pay off.....and I can assure you it eventually will.

The Uncomfortable Road to Success: A Story About You and Me

As I pulled into my driveway around 11:30pm on Thursday night of last week, exhaustion had officially set in. Having driven about 23 hours over the previous 3 days, I was physically spent. But just like many other nights before this one, I still had one major item left on my to-do list—the elliptical.

Although some of my oldest readers have heard me talk about my beloved elliptical before, many of you may not know that each night, somewhere between 9 and 11:30pm, I get on this machine for exactly 60 minutes, without fail. But on this particular night, the physical and mental toll of the previous 3 days were such that I frankly was unsure as to whether or not the workout would even happen.

Decision Time

So as I always do, I walked into my quiet house and slowly drugged into my bedroom, very quietly, so as to not wake up my wife and retrieved my workout clothes out of the dresser. But, as I grabbed its handle to get the clothes, fatigue again became my only thought. Literally, my

head seemed to be spinning. And I knew that if I could just lie down in my bed I'd be out in 30 seconds.

So I stood there. Not sure how long really. But I debated, and debated, and debated. If anyone had seen me there, standing in the dark and looking blankly at a dresser-drawer, they may have thought I was crazy.

Somehow, I eventually summoned the strength and soon walked out of the room with workout clothes in hand.

As I walked by my kitchen table, just before heading to the basement, I stopped again. This time, one thought kept coming to my head:

“Just go to bed man. Just go to bed.”

And so once more, all I could do was stand there. Again and again I rationalized how missing one workout wouldn't matter. It was quite the civil war, to say it in the least.

But just as I was on the cusp of giving in, I found myself saying the same thing I've said many, many times late in the night—“Just give it a go Marcus, even if it's but for a few minutes. Give it a go.”

And so I did. 5 minutes into my workout I was still feeling dizzy from the day. 20 minutes in I was very ready to quit. 30 minutes in I was convincing myself to hang in there a little longer. And 45 minutes in I thought, “You've come this far, just keep going.”

Finally, 60 minutes came. I was done. Ahh yes, the satisfaction of knowing I'd won a little battle, again.

It wasn't comfortable. It wasn't easy. But it was worth it.....as it always is.

Some of you may be wondering why I relate this story. And although it may be a silly one in nature, it's just one example of many in my life that show a true reflection of what the road to success is all about.

Because when it comes down to it folks, **this road that I'm speaking of is not comfortable.**

There's some utopic myth out there that all we need to do is choose our passion and then success will come naturally and easily. To this, I say bull. Success is great, yes, but it's not easy. In fact, the most successful people I know are often times the most uncomfortable.

The Uncomfortable Road to Success

Late one night I sent the incredibly popular blogger and copywriter Ingrid Abboud from [NittyGriddy](#) an email asking some general blog questions. Not at all expecting an answer considering the time (it was about 4:30am her time in Lebanon) I was shocked to receive an immediate reply to my questions. We had a quick conversation that followed:

Me: Girl, what the heck are you doing up at 4:30am???

Ingrid: Actually, I'm emailing with a client as we speak. They're in the States, and because we're on a deadline, I'm still up, getting this all finished.

Needless to say, this little conversation made me raise an eyebrow. It also explains why Ingrid is so good at what she does. Simply put, she accepts the reality that the road to success is often times quite uncomfortable.

Or take JK from [Hustler's Notebook](#), a guy who usually goes to bed after 12:30am (I know, we IM all the time this late) yet still wakes up at 5am.....every morning.....regardless. Just listen to some of his thoughts recently posted:

I want to be clear that it's not all glorious. Being a hustler requires unattractive sacrifices like working instead of playing. While others sleep, you brainstorm While others party, you network While others watch TV, you research. What you're after becomes part of your every thought. And when you want something that bad, it's just a matter of time until it's yours.

The List Goes On and On

It wasn't comfortable when [Srinivas Rao](#) left the States and moved to Costa Rica to pursue his passions, all the while establishing one of the most successful podcasts for bloggers on the web— [BlogcastFM](#).

It wasn't comfortable when Tristan from Blogging Bookshelf wrote about the impact his blog

had on his girlfriend, or the time he posted a blogging video starring Hitler that [was attacked by a few](#) in the blogosphere.

It wasn't comfortable when Gini Dietrich (who wakes up every morning at 4:30am btw) was told by her fiancée to simply quit the job she no longer loved. But that's exactly what she did, and soon after started her own incredibly successful marketing firm, [Arment Dietrich](#), and oh yeah, breathed life into what is now one of the top 40 marketing blogs in the world, [Spin Sucks](#).

It wasn't comfortable when expat extraordinaire John Falchetto was running his first outdoor coaching business from a tribal village perched at 6000 feet in the rugged hills of the UAE, only to eventually move to a small town in France where he'd run his global [expatcoaching company](#).

It wasn't comfortable when [Troy Claus](#) left his job and partnered up with a crazy Scotsman named [Danny Brown](#), but the customers of the powerhouse [Bonsai Interactive Marketing](#) company are sure glad he did.

It wasn't comfortable when Marlee Ward left the financial comforts of being an attorney and chased her passions for [entrepreneurship](#) and helping others reach their potential.

It wasn't comfortable when Ana Hoffman and her husband were out of work for over a year in 2007, but this event was also the impetus to her establishing one of the most successful [web traffic generation](#) blogs in the entire world.

And it certainly wasn't comfortable for Robert Dempsey to [overcome his alcoholism](#) 12 years ago, but it gave him an incredible perspective on life as he went on to become a very well-known and established Internet marketing expert.

Our Challenge

I'm sure you see the pattern here folks. We all have bumps in the road. And do you know what? We should. Whether they're small like the one I faced in the opening paragraphs, or large like the one Robert Dempsey faced—they're all for our growth and betterment.

And even more so, I would go so far to say that if we're not a little uncomfortable, we're simply not pushing ourselves hard enough.

To close, I'd ask you to consider if you're pushing yourself as you should be. Are you

challenging the status quo when necessary, even though it's not comfortable? Are you taking care of your mind, body, and soul.....even when it hurts? And are you reaching the God-given potential you've been blessed with, even though the bumps in the road would dictate otherwise?

If the answer is '*no*', then it's time we pushed a little harder folks.

The Technology Age Myth: Why Being Old is No Excuse Not to Embrace Internet Marketing

“You can't teach an old dog new tricks.”

Ever heard the phrase? Sure you have. So have I. And do you know what else? **I hate it.** In fact, I think it's the worst axiom of all time. Frankly, the theory that old dogs don't learn new tricks has killed more businesses around the world over the past 100 years than any “bad economy” ever could.

Bad Old Dogs.....

Remember Henry Ford? He became an old dog that didn't want to learn new tricks.....and it almost cost him everything.

Remember K-Mart? They were Wally-World before there was a Wally-World.....and now they're a train wreck. How did it happen? A bunch of old dogs were at the helm.

And lest we not forget Blockbuster, the onetime “King of the video Jungle” that now is scraping pennies together to pay their lawyer fees. While new dogs like Netflix were changing the world of movie rentals as we know it the geniuses at Blockbuster were busy ignoring everything that was happening around them.

“Too Old for this Stuff”

I bring up these examples because now that I teach and consult businesses regarding their web marketing strategies I hear a common theme amongst many businesses owners—“I'm too old for all this computer stuff.”

What's funny is that these same business owners are the ones making phone calls to the bank on Fridays to see if they can get a quick cash infusion just to make payroll.

It's a sad cycle folks, and over the next 10 years or so the #1 reason why small businesses around the world will fail is because older entrepreneurs, the one-time cowboys and cowgirls of their industries, will be left behind. Up and comers, younger folks with an open mindset and no fear of technology and the Internet, will take over.

It's funny how leaders of previous generations are always the slowest to embrace the new "ways" of the next generation. Leaders of the industrial age are still just that—industrial experts. Yet they've been deemed irrelevant by those persons fully embracing the information age.

Never Too Old

But here is the catch my friends. It needn't be this way. Why?

Because you are never too old to embrace technology and the Internet.

Yep, that's right. I don't give a rip how old of a dog you are, you can learn this stuff. You can be a "computer guy or gal." You can learn the ins and outs of website design, content creation, video marketing, etc. You can, you can, you can.

The Coolest Couple Ever, Duncan and Debbie Page



A few months ago I had the pleasure of speaking at a marketing conference in Cambridge Massachusetts for [HubSpot](#), arguably the leading inbound/web marketing platform in the world for small businesses. While there, I was thrilled to mingle with incredible people. Not only did I get a chance to rub elbows with superstars like [Chris Brogan](#) and [Ann Handley](#), but I also learned the stories of some other remarkable marketers.

Of all the people I met though, I was most impressed by an older couple—Duncan and Debbie Page. What’s crazy about these two folks is that despite falling in the +50 crowd, both have, without a lick of previous knowledge, embraced Internet marketing to its fullest.

Duncan, the owner of a [fencing company](#) that has been around in his family for over 100 years, became so frustrated with his lack of “web control” a couple of years ago that he decided (instead of crawling in a hole) to do something about it. That’s when he found HubSpot and through their tools became his own webmaster. He also developed an incredibly popular fencing blog and because of the results and increased lead generation, took his business nationwide—all this from “an old dog.”

Peggy, Duncan’s lovely wife, is a lactation specialist. And just like her husband, Peggy, in an effort to stay modern and innovative, developed her [own website](#) (via HubSpot) and quickly found tremendous success through video and blogging. If you don’t believe me, just check out her [Facebook page](#) which has a meager 2000 fans!

As I sat with Peggy and Duncan and discussed with them their inbound marketing strategies, one statement Debbie made gave me a smile I won’t soon forget. She said:

“Some older couples just talk about kids and family and stuff like that at the dinner table. And although we do this too, we spend quite a bit of time comparing our daily website analytics, stats, etc.”

When Peggy told me this I could only smile at the idea of two “old dogs” (age only) that have both embraced new tricks. Un-freaking-believable.

Age is No Excuse

My point, folks, is that there is no excuse. If you ever find yourself thinking you’re ‘too old’ to embrace web design, blogging, content marketing, etc; then you need to douse your head in water and slap both cheeks a few times, because you’re way out of touch.

Don’t allow yourself to be left behind. Don’t label yourself in any way other than an innovator

and thought leader. I can promise you that although you may be looking up a steep mountain right now, eventually you will get to the top, likely quicker than you think, and you'll be dang glad you made that simple decision to take the first step.

The Law of Compound Information in Marketing: Timing is Everything

I was speaking to a client a couple of days ago who, up to this point as a business owner, has basically done squat as a content marketer. In other words, he has no blog, he has done no video, and just isn't currently thinking like a consumer.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings though, this guy has already placed himself in front of many in his niche just by merely recognizing he has marketing and branding "issues." After talking for a while regarding his next steps, he asked me the following question:

So let's just say I keep things like they are this year and then when I have a little more time, I get going with all this inbound marketing stuff??

My response was simple:

You don't understand the Law of Compound Information.

Timing is Everything

Most of us have heard about **Compound Interest** in the past. For anyone looking to garner a financial nest egg and live a financially sound retirement, this action is usually a must. Here is what Wikipedia says regarding the subject:

Compound interest arises when interest is added to the principal, so that from that moment on, the interest that has been added also itself earns interest. This addition of interest to the principal is called compounding. A bank account, for example, may have its interest compounded every year: in this case, an account with \$1000 initial principal and 20% interest per year would have a balance of \$1200 at the end of the first year, \$1440 at the end of the second year, and so on.....

Without having a deep economic discussion here, compound interest equates to your money's ability to grow over time. And what will impact this growth curve the most? When it comes down to it, there are 3 main factors. Wiki states further:

The effect of compounding depends on the frequency with which interest is compounded and the periodic interest rate which is applied. Therefore, in order to define accurately the amount to be paid under a legal contract with interest, the frequency of compounding (yearly, half-yearly, quarterly, monthly, daily, etc.) and the interest rate must be specified.

What does this mean for your business?

We've all heard that inbound/content marketing is an investment. But just like any investment, your return on said investment (ROI) will be greatly impacted by the following economic principles:

Frequency

This is huge. How often are you blogging? How often are you adding video to your site? Are you constantly looking for ways to add new pages to your site or has it been stuck on the same number for the last 6 months?

Hopefully you see what I'm saying here. Your two biggest customers, Search Engines (like Google) and consumers (anyone that might buy something from you) need to be fed great information often so as to give you respect and love. This may sound too simplistic but it's incredibly true.

Understand that each and every article you write gives Google more opportunity to look at your site, notice your value to the consumer, and then show you on the first page for more and more key phrases in your niche. By simply compounding your articles and the information therein, your organic search results will only continue to go up.

Furthermore, when consumers constantly see you giving more and more useful information to anyone who cares to listen, respect is garnered and your brand awareness naturally climbs. I've seen this process again and again and frankly it's a beautiful thing.

The Value of the Interest (Information) Rate

I equate this one to the value of the information you're actually giving consumers. To give you an example, let's say your company blog is a glorified calendar and sales pitch. Because all you ever talk about in your blog posts is how great your company's products and services are, as well all of your "amazing accomplishments," the value to the consumer will be low. In fact, they'll quickly cover their eyes and ears because you're not actually helping *them*.

But if your blog is all about the consumer—if it teaches them everything there is to know about your product/service—then you’re going to get major love. People will read you often. Links will come your way from other websites. And because of this, Google will again look upon your site with a smile and rank you higher and higher in organic search results.

Time

What’s the first thing anyone talks about when saving to build wealth? That’s right, TIME. Timing, in many ways, is everything. For example, if you invest \$100 a month into some type of savings plan at the age of 20 and don’t touch your money until you’re 50, you’ll have way more money than the 50 year-old guy that started investing \$200 a month when he was 30. The simple reason for this is timing.

This is why it’s a terrible idea to just wait to embrace content and inbound marketing. The company that started writing 2 great blog articles a week 5 years ago is **CRUSHING** the company that started writing 4 great articles a week 2 years ago. Although this may not sound fair to some, it’s the facts. Just look around the web and you’ll start to see exactly how the principal of compound information really works and is critical for any business.

So please consider this reality as you consider content/inbound marketing for your business. The idea of “waiting for a better time” makes no sense. Start compounding your information *today*. Start getting noticed by Google and consumers *today*. I can assure you that if you do decide to wait, your business will be sadly left behind by those businesses that were actually willing to see the big picture and embrace the mind of the 21st century consumer

Chapter 3: Blogging to Make Millions

Why Blogging is the Greatest Sales Tool in the World Today

Blogging works, right? Yeah, sure it does. If done properly, it can create for your business one of the most dominant SEO campaigns on the web, thus driving tons of traffic to your site that will hopefully end up in leads and ultimately sales.

But let's assume for just a few minutes here that blogging did nothing for SEO. Let's say it never garnered your company's website any new traffic whatsoever. *Would it still be worth it??* In short, here's the answer: **You're dang right it would be worth it.**

I hear companies talking about how blogging and content marketing can impact their bottom line, but rarely do I speak with someone who understands the true vision and impact that a continuous flow of content can have on an existing customer base, especially those that are already in your sales funnel (existing leads).

For example, the other night I went on a sales appointment (for my swimming pool company) to see a lady that I'd met with two years ago but at the time decided not to purchase a pool. Knowing this would be my second visit with her, I was determined not to let another opportunity to slip through the cracks.

For about 45 minutes, I discussed with the lady what she was looking for and found out that she had subscribed to my company blog during the time of our last meeting and thus had been diligently researching swimming pools for over two years. In fact, because she was so loyal to our blog she was as knowledgeable about pools as a first time buyer can possibly be. Thinking everything was looking great, I gave the lady the total price asked for a deposit, and this is the conversation that then ensued:

Lady: Well, I like your quote and your company but I just can't make a decision tonight.

Me: Why? (When it comes to sales, I prefer direct questions)

Lady: To be honest, I have another appointment with another company next week.

Me: Why?

Lady: Because I've been told you're supposed to get 2 or 3 quotes whenever you make a purchase like this.

Me: Hmm, that's interesting. Who are you planning on meeting with?

Lady:<company X> (names are hidden to protect the innocent)

Me: Company X? Really? Well let me ask you this. Over the past two years, how many articles of "Company X" have you read that taught you something about pools?

Lady: Uhhmm, well, none.

Me: And over the past two years, how many times has "Company X" bothered sending you any information that showed they really and truly cared about your swimming pool experience, regardless of whether you went with their company or not?

Lady: That would be none also.

Me: And over the past two years, who has sent you two emails every week so as to assure you're continually learning and staying informed as to the happenings of the pool industry?

Lady: You have Marcus.

Me: Ma'am, where have you essentially learned everything you know about swimming pools?

Lady: (with a shameful smile at this point) Your blog Marcus.

Me: Then why in the world would you be getting another quote when you already know we're the right company for you?

Lady: I guess it's silly, isn't it?

Me: Yep, sure is, crazy in fact, so go ahead and cancel that appointment and the deposit tonight will be \$250,000 (actually, it wasn't close to that but I figured 250k would sound much cooler).....

Lady: (with a big smile) Sounds great.

When all was said and done and the kind lady had written me a check, she said she was thrilled and relieved to finally be done with the process and have made a decision. But in my mind, there was one reason why we were able to have the above conversation and subsequent agreement:

Great content leads to even greater trust.

So think about this the next time you're debating on whether or not your company should be blogging. Remember, whether you get huge SEO benefits or not, you should be producing great content for those persons in your sales funnel that are still "in the game" but have yet to actually pull the trigger and make that all-important buying decision. If you do this, I can assure you that you'll discover blogging and content to be the best sales tool in the world in this new information age we are all a part of.

5 Small Business Blogging Benefits Nobody is Talking About

OK, so we've all heard it by now: If you own a business, and if you want to truly have any web marketing presence at all, you need to be blogging. With benefits like SEO, subscribers, and inbound links; content marketing for small businesses can pay some serious dividends.

But today I want to focus on a few blogging benefits that very few, if any, are talking about on the Internet. Let's take a look:

1. Page Views Equal Sales:

When I first started blogging for my [swimming pool company](#) two years ago, I had no idea of the following benefit. Basically, after studying my analytics for a few months, I realized a very fascinating statistic:

30 prospect pages views=80% closing ratio in sales appointments

In other words, if I could ensure that every prospect read at least 30 pages of my website before a sales appointment, 4 out of every 5 appointments would end up as a sale. Think about that for a second.....Considering the average closing rate is around 15% in the swimming pool industry, the fact that my company closes about 80% of those persons that read more than 30 pages of our site is a profound statistic. But in reality, it makes plenty of sense. Why? Because great content leads to trust which in turn leads to sales. This is also why our closing rates for prospects that read *less* than 30 pages of the website hovers around 40%, roughly half of that of the "content hungry" customers.

But what would happen if my website was like most in the swimming pool industry and less than 20 total pages with very few great articles to teach and educate consumers? How would the trust be garnered then? That's right, our closing rates would be average just like everyone else's.

So consider this stat with your company's blog. How many pages do your customers need to read before they reach a "tipping point" and closing rates skyrocket? Just by knowing this little bit of information your entire marketing and sales approach will be drastically improved.

2. Blog Articles Mean Better Emails

This one goes hand-in-hand with #1 but the majority of small businesses have terrible email marketing campaigns with their customer-lead base. Sadly, most are boring, monotonous, and stink when it comes to creativity. This is why I tell business owners and marketers that every email should contain at least one, if not many, links to previous blog articles your company has written. As customers are shown intriguing links to articles on your site, they'll be more inclined to click said links and start the process of education, pages views, and trust building.

3. Forced Cognition

Ask anyone in sales who has a blog if their writing has increased their effectiveness and closing rates and they'll tell you "yes" every time. The reason for this is simple. Blogging forces us to constantly study, analyze, question, ponder, and test our products and services. This constant activity leads to a depth and breadth of knowledge that empowers sales professionals to be tremendous communicators.

4. Blogging can have a Tribal Effect on Staff

As human beings, we love to work on a team and strive for a common goal. Such is also true with content marketing. When a company has two or more people that contribute blog posts, a "team" feeling can be created amongst the group as everyone participates in the company's web marketing and sales success. In turn, this teamwork leads to camaraderie, higher morale, and better working relationships in general as everyone contributes.

5. Blogging will Lead to Other Income Opportunities

Here is the deal—Blogging, when done properly, will make you and your company very attractive. Not only will it garner you many more visitors to your website, but it will also leverage your company as a major player/force in your industry. As this happens, you will start to receive outside offers from other businesses, vendors, etc. that will want to share in your success.

To give you an example, because my swimming pool blog is so successful, in the past 2 years I've been approached with franchise opportunities, speaking/consulting gigs, companies have offered to "buy us out," etc. Similar events are now happening on The Sales Lion as well.

When it comes down to it, people are attracted to winners. If your company has a great, information-driven blog that influences your niche, you will clearly be seen as such—a **"winner."** Once this happens, just watch the opportunities role in.

That Ain't My Shtick...The Power of Knowing Who You Are in Business

A few weeks ago, my business partners and I had the interesting experience of having 3 cameramen follow us around for a day as part of a documentary they were doing that would end up being used as an education piece in college business schools across the country. The group had read about us online and knew of our unique story, so they wanted to catch footage of all aspects of the business—from installing pools to taking lead calls in the office.

During one of these lead calls in my office, as the cameraman stood over me and recorded, I had a very interesting conversation with a prospect. Basically, the prospect had two major needs: He wanted a pool large/deep enough for a diving board, but he also wanted a very large play area with the pool (section of water less than 4' deep). After discussing these needs with him for about 5 minutes and realizing they were a critical aspect of his buying decision, I told the prospect the following:

Me: Well sir, to be completely honest, I don't think we have a swimming pool that's going to fit your needs based on what you've told us.

Prospect: Really, why is that?

Me: Fiberglass pools do not get any larger than 16'x40'. What this means is that if you have a diving pool, the first 1/3 of the pool, or about 13' is going to be play area. The next 1/3 of the pool is going to be a hard slope, which serves very little purpose. And the final 1/3 is going to be a diving well (8' deep). Because you'll only have 13' as a play area, I don't think that will be enough to make you happy.

Prospect: No, 13' is not enough, what's our solution?

Me: Well, I think you're going to need a concrete pool in this case. They don't have size/shape limitations, and it sounds like what you're really going to need is an L-shaped pool—two unique bodies of water, one being shallow and one being deep.

Prospect: But you all don't sell concrete pools, do you?

Me: No, we don't. But if you're really serious about your two major needs of play area and diving area, that's the only solution I can offer you. **Honestly, I just don't think we're the company for you.**

Prospect: Well thanks for your honesty, I do appreciate it.

After I got off of the call, one of the cameramen looked at me mystified, and this was the conversation that followed:

Cameraman: Are you telling me you turned down that guy's business? I would never do that!

Me: Our product doesn't fit his needs, and I'm not going to lie to the guy. He wants a large play area and a large diving area in his pool. We simply can't offer that, and I'm not going to pretend we can.

Cameraman: Yeah, but selling is selling and you should still try to convince him that he should go with your company.

Me: First of all, I am not dying for his business. We do inbound marketing, and because we're so dang good at it I get tons of leads every day. I'm looking for *great* leads, not ones I have to convince about our product. If I had met with this fellow at his home, two other concrete pool guys would have come out and convinced him of what I just told him—our product isn't the right fit, period.

Cameraman: Well I've never turned down a job.

Me: That's because of two reasons: **Your marketing has never been that good and you really don't know who you are.** My product fits 80% of the marketplace. I don't worry about the other 20%. The fact is, **I sell more because I'm worried about less.**

Cameraman: I think that's crazy.

Me: (laughing) Yeah, I may have thought the same until I really learned who I was and stopped trying to please everyone else. The moment I did that, everything changed. You should try it sometime.

I'm not sure if that phone call is going to be on the documentary, but if I was calling the shots, it would be the first thing college students saw, as it's that important. After being an entrepreneur for over 10 years now, I've come to this conclusion: **Most people in business have no idea who**

they really are.

For example, as I've mentioned here before, when I started my pool company I offered vinyl liner inground pools, fiberglass pools, above ground pools, retail, and many other items. Today, 10 years later, I do ONE thing—fiberglass pools. And because of that, our company is nationally branded as *the* fiberglass pool company. I'm not saying this to brag, that's just how it is.

Blogging Identities and Shticks

I see many bloggers suffering from this same problem when it comes to branding and identity. They try to make money in a handful of ways but they never become **truly** known in the blogosphere for anything, and that's why they eventually give up.

For example, folks in the blogosphere know me as a guy with an incredible community that passionately talks about inbound marketing and [HubSpot](#). I don't spend a bunch of time trying to act like I know all things web, social media, affiliate marketing, etc. Although I may be interested in those things, they aren't my [shtick](#). But when it comes to inbound marketing and blogging—oh yeah, that's me.

For example, last week I had two large companies contact me about what I would charge to come out and speak to their organizations. Both requests were practically identical—they wanted me to get their employees fired up about inbound marketing. These types of contacts are starting to become very common, but they're just a natural result of consistent branding, hard work, and a sense of self.

But I see many other bloggers who know who they are. **John Falchetto** is an [expat life coach](#). **Wim** is a [sales coach](#). **Alex Whalley** rocks with [niche and affiliate websites](#). **Steve Scott** is solely focused on helping people [make money online](#). And the ever popular **JK Allen** teaches people [how to hustle through life](#) and business. These are just a few examples of bloggers with a clear sense of “self.”

So that's the challenge folks. Who are you? What's your shtick? And do other people see you or your business the same way you do? If you know these things, your ability to experience huge success on and offline will be increased dramatically.

5 Reasons You Should ALWAYS Talk about Product Pricing and Costs on Your Company Website

I don't get it. Seriously, what is the deal with small business websites and their fear of talking about the one thing that makes every transaction a reality? Yes, you guessed it, that "one thing" is **MONEY**.

Yep, the last I looked, if consumers and customers don't have money, they have a tough time buying things (well, not including the housing market from 2001-2008). So, being that money is so vital to the purchase of a product or service, why is everyone afraid of it?

I'm guessing the answer is that they are afraid they'll end up turning-off a consumer, or possibly scare them away. Personally, I think such a fear is crazy, bonkers, (fill in your own adjective here). In fact, the first question a serious consumer will ask when they are considering the purchase of a product is:

How much does it cost?

Notwithstanding this all-important inquiry, hundreds of thousands of companies don't even begin to mention pricing on their websites.....Hmmmmm, *Houston, we have a problem.*

Over the years I've learned that being open and honest regarding pricing is fundamental to success in sales and marketing. In fact, here are 5 reasons why you should always discuss product costs on your website:

1. People want to know: Wow, now that's deep. But seriously, just like I mentioned above, serious consumers know the Internet will give them the answers there are looking for if they search long enough. And if they can't find them on your site, guess what happens? Yep, they go check out your competitor's site and look for the answers there. Remember, any question a consumer asks about your product should be answered on your company blog/website.

2. Search Engines will give you LOVE: That's right—big time love. Do yourself a favor and go to Google and type in the phrase *Fiberglass Pool Cost* or *How much does a fiberglass pool cost*. If you simply type these phrases in, or any similar phrase for that matter, my [pool company's website](#) will come up 1 or 2 on search results every time.

This page has been #1 on Google for about 2 years now and it's all because I spoke extensively on my website about fiberglass pool pricing before *any* other company in the world did.

Crazy.....but true. As mentioned in the video below, this phrase has garnered me thousands and thousands of dollars in sales.

3. Consumers will appreciate your honesty: Despite this nutty myth that consumers don't like to talk about pricing, you will find that most potential clients greatly appreciate the fact that they were finally able to get great answers from you and your company. This gratitude leads to respect which in-turn leads to trust.....and ultimately leads to sales.

4. You will not waste time with unqualified customers: Because financing has become so difficult these days, the idea of "*If they have a heartbeat we can get 'emcredit*" is deader than a doornail. I don't know about you, but as a sales and marketing professional, I'm not interested in spending tons of time trying to sell a product to someone who can't even afford to buy said product. Remember, our time is very valuable, and the quicker we can focus our relationships and efforts on qualified candidates, the more successful we'll be.....and the less rejection we'll receive.

5. No Surprises: Have you ever talked with a client and after having given them your price/quote/proposal they give you that, "Oh my goodness, I'm going to pass out" look? If this has ever happened, you and your website did a pretty poor job preparing them for what was expected. This is also why I always send out at least one well-written "pricing/cost" article to any lead that comes into my data base.

So please take this information to heart. If it's not there already, get busy talking about pricing on your website. Give the consumers what they're looking for. Answer their questions. By so doing I can assure you that you and your brand will take another step toward niche domination and your bottom-line will benefit greatly.

How to Come Up with 100 Blog Articles for Your Business in 10 Minutes or Less

Content Creation—Studies have shown it's the most difficult part of starting, and maintaining, a successful blog for any business. Having written about 250 blog posts and articles over the past year, I'm stoked to share a system with you that has made the process of article creation simple, fun, and extremely effective.

Although I could go into great detail as to the essential keys to unlimited blog ideas and articles for your business, I'm just going to give here 2 easy-to-follow and succinct strategies.

1. Write down on a sheet of paper EVERY question a prospect/customer has ever asked you.

I know, you may think this sounds odd, but it's an incredible strategy for helping marketers to start to think like consumers and develop a long-tail keyword strategy at the same time. When you do this exercise, don't take the time to edit—just write, and write as fast as you can. If you can have someone or a group of people brainstorm consumer questions with you, then even better.

Once you've written down as many questions as possible (25 minimum or you're just either being lazy or your brain is not working), you now have the actual blog titles for all of your articles. For example, if you come up with 30 consumer questions, and you post 2 blogs every week, that means you have roughly 3 months worth of excellent blog articles.

Sound pretty simple? Well it is, it's just that many people make out the process of content creation much more difficult than it needs to be.

2. Focus on Negative Phrases consumers will ask when considering the product

Not sure what negative phrases are? If not, it's time to learn, because they are an essential key to long-tail domination and will work wonders for your blog's organic search results.

Let's assume you sell concrete swimming pools. A few examples of "negative" articles would be: Top 5 Consumer Complaints Regarding Concrete Swimming Pools; Top 5 Problems and Solutions of Concrete Swimming Pools; What are the Pros and Cons of Concrete Swimming Pools? Are Concrete Swimming Pools Bad? Read 5 Very Interesting Customer Reviews Regarding Concrete Swimming Pools

Hopefully you're seeing my point here and how the pattern works. When I explain this pattern to business owners, rarely do they understand it at first. In their minds, why would it do any good to even mention the negatives of a product? Although I do see why this would initially be a concern, you must remember these two keys: Consumers are going to search for these phrases whether you like it or not. That's what they do. By addressing a product's supposed drawbacks, problems, etc., you can actually beat your competitors to the punch and explain fully the good, bad, and ugly of a product—thus lending you massive credibility and thwarting the efforts of those that might talk down your product.

Hopefully you understand these two simple steps and will now apply them to your company's content marketing campaign.

I can assure you as you follow these steps, you will be amazed at just how many new ideas and articles come rushing to your mind. Not only will this prevent writer's block and frustration, but it will also lay the pattern to huge traffic results and respect from consumers and search engines alike.

7 Content Ideas that Will Blow Up Your Brand and Business in 12 Months or Less -- Guaranteed

OK, we've heard all the phrases—**Content is king, Content Rules, Content is Everything**..... Yes, yes, yes, it's true, no doubt. But the real question is no longer about just producing content—it's about writing stuff that truly teaches, inspires, and answers consumer questions. And not only that, it's about producing content that stands out—that's opinionated—and makes the world (your industry) take notice.

So the obvious question is how? How can your business come up with article ideas that will skyrocket your brand, garner web traffic, and also rock and roll when it comes to SEO (search engine optimization)?

That's what this article is all about. Having coached in the last year businesses from all walks around the globe on this very subject, I'm stoked to discuss today simple yet extremely unique strategies that will not only give you stacks upon stacks of consumer and SEO friendly content, but will also leave you thinking in no time (once you look at your website's analytics)—“Wow, how did this all happen??”

7 Content Ideas that Will Forever Change Your Business

1. Pricing Articles

I'm always amazed at how often I'll go to a company's website and they are afraid to discuss pricing. I'm telling you, this is just about the dumbest thing ever. For whatever reason, many companies want to have customers meet with a sales person before that evil thing we call “pricing” is ever brought up.

But think about it for a second—When you’re interested in a product, what’s the first thing you look for when you’re on someone’s site? Yep, that’s right, you want to know how much the dang thing costs. And if you can’t find any pricing info? That’s right, you move on to the next site.

So if you’re a business owner and you’re not talking about product pricing on your website, then get with the program, because you’re not only losing business but it also appears as if you’re embarrassed about your own pricing. (Keep in mind here that you don’t have to always give specific pricing per se. Ranges are fine, especially if your product or service varies in its cost.)

Just to give you an example of what I’m talking about, type in “fiberglass pool pricing” in your little Google box. In the first couple of places you’ll see [this article](#) that I wrote about 1 year ago. And how many views has it gotten during this 12 month period? Well, to be exact, a decent 31,279 reads. Not too bad, eh?

2. Cost Articles

I know what you’re thinking—“Marcus, you just talked about this.” Yes, I did, but in the eyes of Google and their algorithm, I clearly did not. You see, when it comes to product pricing, there is a large group of people that will type/search (let’s assume your company sells widgets) “Widget Pricing” or “Prices on Widgets” and then there is another group that will type in “Widget Costs” or “Costs of Widgets.”

Are you seeing what I’m saying here? When it comes to awesome content that gets major love from the search engines you need to write articles that address *exact phrases and words*, not just general ideas. This is very, very critical to understand if you want to be successful.

Just to shed further light on this, the most successful page on my pool website is far and away the [fiberglass pool cost page](#), which, in the last year alone has been read exactly 54,305 times. (And no, I’m not kidding).

So to reiterate what I’m saying, the 2 most popular pages on my entire website **both talk about the exact same subject**, but address two very, very different words—cost and price.

3. Vs. Articles

Whenever I meet with a new client, one of the first things I talk with them about is their competing products and manufacturers. For example, let’s assume that your company sells John Deere lawnmowers. This being said, you are competing with handfuls of other lawn mower

manufacturers, which also means your potential customer base has to choose between said manufacturers.

Let's assume someone came to your store and got a quote on John Deer X model. Then, after going down the street or looking on the Internet, they get a quote on a Husqvarna Y model. Being confused as to which is better, they go to Google for advice and type in *John Deer X vs. Husqvarna Y: Which is Better?* If you've written an article on such a topic, and it's good, there is a very good chance you could show up on the first page of Google for said results.

A perfect example of one I've written is ["Fiberglass vs Concrete Pools: Which is Better?"](#) This article alone has garnered 56 inbound links and has been read 8,652 times in the last 15 months.

4. Problems Articles

Whenever a person is looking to spend money on a product, one of the first things they do is seek out the negatives or drawbacks to said product. For example, in the inground swimming pool industry, there are 3 types of pools—concrete, vinyl, and fiberglass. And considering that many builders like to blab all day long about the “problems” of the other products (types of pools), consumers are constantly typing in Google “problem” oriented phrases.

To give a powerful example of this, my business partner Jason (of [Skyward Blog](#)) once wrote a landmark article called [Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions](#). Because no one in our industry had ever had the guts/marketing sense to write about such a topic, it immediately shot to the first page of Google. And how has it done since? Well, in just over one year it has garnered 137 comments, 168 inbound links, and 25,589 views as of today's date.

Seriously folks, this is an amazing content strategy and you need to do it **today**.

5. Review Articles

I love review articles. So do consumers. But for whatever reason, companies are afraid to write them. My question is this—We market and sell our products and services all day long, during which time we are comparing said products/services with other companies, so why are we so afraid to take these same thoughts and put them to pen?? Frankly, it makes no sense to me at all.

If you really want to see further what I'm talking about here, just type in Google any phrase that has to do with “fiberglass pool reviews” and you'll see one of my articles show up on the first page—every time.

6. Awards

Ahh yes, award articles. Man these work great! Here are a few I've written over the past couple of years with their corresponding stats:

[4 Fiberglass Pool Manufacturers to Watch Out For in 2011](#): Written only 2 months ago, this article has garnered 118 inbound links and 1544 views

[Large Fiberglass Pool Design Awards For 2010](#): 1749 views to date

[Small Inground Fiberglass Pool Design Awards For 2010](#): 54 inbound links and 6,886 views to date

You may be asking yourself the question, “What gives me the right to give out awards to vendors/manufacturers in my industry?” The answer is simple—You have an opinion. And you're an expert in your field. So share it.

As you can see, the traffic and SEO juice is exceptional.

7. Gimmicks

Every industry has its gimmicks. I see it every day in the Internet marketing world, the swimming pool industry, and the many other fields in which I've assisted clients. It doesn't matter the niche, they're all the same, and there are going to be gimmicks, frauds, hacks, whatever.

But the main question is this: **What are you going to do about it?** Are you going to just let it be or are you going to nail your 95 Thesis to the church door and call them out? Yes, the latter will garner positive and negative attention from those in your field, but in terms of marketing and branding, there's no question the results will be well worth it.

Here's an example of a “gimmick” article I've written before:

[The Most Egregious Fiberglass Pool Warranty I've Ever Seen](#)

So there you have it folks, 7 content ideas that should get your creative juices flowing and if followed through with, will have a huge impact on your company's brand, web traffic, and bottom line. Yes, I know much of what you read above is a new way of thinking, but trust me, it

will work, and if you have further questions as to how, email me at marcus1@thesaleslion.com and we'll make it happen together.

How Brutally Honest Blogging will Skyrocket Your Business to the Top of Your Industry

As I've been stressing quite a bit lately, the giving of great content, especially by means of that wonderful tool we call blogging, is the future key to the marketing success of any business or niche. By moving from the industrial age to the information age, the minds and shopping patterns of today's consumers are quite different than they were just a few short years ago. This is why content marketing—i.e. blogging, is taking the world by storm.

But what's most interesting as I analyze businesses around the globe is that although most now understand that they must teach and give great content to their consumer base, they really don't know how to achieve such a task effectively. Yes, many companies are able to accurately portray what makes their products wonderful and how consumers will benefit from said products, but the truth is this method is only half of the equation. And what's the equation?

He who gives consumers the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of a product will always be the content king.

And for the sake of this article, I really want you to focus on the “bad” and “ugly,” as we all pretty much understand how to talk and teach consumers about the ‘good’ regarding our products and services. Allow me to explain.

As an entrepreneur, my main business is in the swimming pool industry. Specifically, my company specializes in installing fiberglass swimming pools. Each year, thousands and thousands of consumers all over the United States and Canada go through the process of buying an inground swimming pool. And for many of these people, the process is not an easy one. Essentially, pool shoppers have to answer the following main questions: What type of pool should I choose? (Concrete, Vinyl Liner, or Fiberglass) If I'm going with fiberglass, which manufacturer will best suite my needs? Which builder will I feel most comfortable with? Etc., etc., etc.

Such questions are applicable to any industry. When a consumer is in the buying process, they will naturally ask many questions. These questions will lead to research, which is where the whole paradigm of blogging and content marketing, showing the good, the bad, and the ugly, comes into play. Turning back to swimming pools, let me explain how this is key.

Up Front Information

Often times I have customers that are debating between a fiberglass and concrete pool. These same shoppers will typically get a quote from a fiberglass pool builder (like myself) and then they'll also go to a concrete pool builder. During this process, you can imagine a lot of misinformation and product-bashing gets thrown around.

As we know all too well with sales, some supposed "sales professionals" will do or say anything to sway a consumer to their way of thinking. In my case, concrete pool companies will often point out to shoppers the possible problems, issues, and draw backs to owning a fiberglass swimming pool. Some of their points are legitimate, and others are total bologna, but notwithstanding it causes a consumer to be left trying to choose between the words of one sales person versus another.

This is where proper blogging and content marketing comes into serious play.

Recognizing that consumers are going to hear all types of "problems" and "myths" regarding fiberglass pools, my business partners and I set out over a year ago to beat our competitors to the punch. In other words, unlike most pool companies that sit there and praise their type of swimming pool "hook or crook," we've elected to go the informative, non-biased route and teach our customers all of the good, the bad, and the ugly that come with fiberglass swimming pools.

Literally, as far as I'm aware, this is a paradigm that is not currently shared by a single company in the swimming pool industry. (That is until everyone reads this blog tomorrow.)

But the flaw is not specific to the swimming pool industry; it's prevalent in just about every industry you can possibly imagine. Everyone is one-sided. Everyone is biased. And consumers, frankly speaking, see right through the crapola.

Be Different

This is why the company in any industry that is not afraid to stand up and blog about the good, the bad, and the ugly of their products will eventually gain the respect, admiration, and loyalty of the consumer base.

For example, out of all the blogs my company has ever produced, (over 125 the past 12 months) do you know what the two most popular articles are?

#1: [Fiberglass Pool Prices: How Much is My Pool Really Going to Cost](#)

#2: [Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions](#)

Both have had thousands of views and with a little bit of analysis, it's no wonder why these two articles have done so very well for us. I attribute their success to 3 main reasons:

1. Most pool companies are scared to talk in-depth about pricing on their website. This strategy is the antithesis of true content marketing and is, for lack of a better term, dumb. This is especially true for the “problems” article. Obviously, because businesses are so scared to even mention the possibility their product might have some inherent flaws, they elect to only paint pretty pictures, all-the-while doubting the consumer's ability to see right through their biased tendencies.
2. The first question a serious fiberglass pool shopper is going to ask is: How much does a fiberglass pool cost?
3. The reason why the “problems” article is so prolific is because after a shopper talks to a concrete pool sales person and hears about all the supposed issues with fiberglass pools, the first thing they are going to do is attempt to verify the fact with Google.

This is why if you go on Google right now and type in “fiberglass pool cost” or “fiberglass pool problems,” my company's site is going to show up number one. You see, when it comes down to it, Google ain't stupid. Their search engines, although sometimes slow, will eventually find the best and most relevant search content. Such is their job and they are doing it better and better with each passing day.

A Broken Paradigm

Recently I got into a debate with someone in my industry regarding my belief in giving consumers the good and bad points to any product. Because this person is such an advocate for fiberglass swimming pools, he thought it was a bad idea to even mention any of their flaws. Sadly, his paradigm is shared by roughly 99% of small businesses out there. But this is why he is wrong:

Consumers are getting better and better at searching online. So whether we (as biz owners and marketers) want to accept it or not, they are going to find and learn about all the good and bad of any product.

Because consumers will eventually find and learn about all sides, addressing a product's issues upfront versus acting like such problems don't exist is incredibly proactive and effective. Doing it any other way just doesn't make any sense.

This is why he who paints the entire picture, instead of just part of it, will gain dominance in his niche and/or industry. Just go to my [blog](#) on fiberglass pool problems and see how many comments are under the article. Literally, there isn't a single blog article in the entire pool

industry that comes close to so many comments.

The Challenge

So to those persons that think that such a strategy of utter honesty is a bad method for content marketing and blogging, I seriously beg to differ and would ask you to reconsider your antiquated methodology of thought.

To close, I just want to challenge all business owners to start seeing the world through **their customer's eyes**. Start writing for *them*. Their thoughts, concerns, questions, etc should be the core of any business' website and blog platform. Blog with brutal honesty. Be real. Be different. Have some guts and give consumers answers to *all* the questions they want to hear. I can promise you the results will be unbelievable.

Gutsy Bloggers and the Amazing Power of Opinion

It was December of 2007. As a “pool guy” during Christmas season, I was sitting at home, feeling the need to get something accomplished despite the seasonality of my business. I had been in the fiberglass swimming pool industry for about 6 years and knew it was time for a change.

Opinion Takes Form

You see, up to that point in the industry, no one had produced content to teach consumers how to buy, install, or own a fiberglass swimming pool. And as I looked around the country, all I could see were salespersons that were pitching their products, yet rarely giving consumers an ounce of value. With the information age in full effect, I decided it was time to put my thoughts to pen. It was time to write. It was time to teach. And it was certainly time to share my opinions.

So before I ever even knew what a “blog” was, I sat down at my kitchen table and commenced typing everything I'd been teaching consumers in the home about fiberglass swimming pools for the previous 6 years. I spoke of the right and the wrong ways to do things. I mentioned the good, the bad, and the ugly of the industry. And I even, based on the hundreds of swimming pools my company had installed up to that point, came up with the first consumer review/ratings system for fiberglass pool manufacturers—the “Big Boys” of the industry.

After 3 days and 50 or so pages, the eBook was complete. About a month later, my first “educational” site was live, and “**Pool School**” was born.

The site was a simple one, as you'll see if you [go there](#) today. Its main purpose was to sell my little eBook . Little did I know it would change my life in many, many ways.

The Attacks Begin

Within days of releasing the book, almost every fiberglass manufacturer (most of which I'd never spoken to previously) in the country contacted me directly. Some praised the eBook. Others angrily questioned its statements. But be rest assured, everyone had an opinion.....and it was the talk of the industry.

But the commotion didn't stop there. A few weeks later I received 2 different letters from attorneys representing manufacturers that were ready to sue if I didn't remove their names from my eBook.

The Power of Opinionated Content

For the first time in my life, I was catching a glimpse of the power of content. But not just the power of content per se, but **the power of content with an opinion.**

Without going into too many details, that simple eBook, and my subsequent blog which was started months later, has taught me incredible lessons about life, opinions, boldness, and guts.

Heck, I was once even sued for 5 million dollars. Can you believe that? Yep, all in the name of content.

But here I am today, unscathed, and a better man for the trials I've faced over these past four years. And what have been the results of such an opinionated and educational focus? Here's the quick version:

1. As most already know, my swimming pool blog is the most popular website in the entire swimming pool industry. Companies that do 50 million dollars a year in sales don't hold a stick to the amount of traffic we get on our site. Just to give you one example, we once published [an article](#) called *Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions*. A gutsy article to say it in the least, it was read a meager 35,000 times in 2010.

2. Our company has been branded as the premier fiberglass swimming pool construction company in the country. This has lead to major respect from consumers in our area and around the globe. In fact, during the summer, I typically receive 10 or more emails a day from

consumers from all over the world asking questions and looking for solutions to their swimming pool problems.

3. My little eBook, at almost no expense to me, has sold well over 1000 copies, and sales go up each and every year.

4. We sell pools.....and lots of them.

But there is one reason why all this happens folks—It's because we take a stand with everything. We don't believe much in gray. For us, there is almost always a right and wrong way to do things, black and white, if you will.

Are You Willing to Take a Stand?

I cite this example because every great blog—whether it's run by an individual, a small business, or a corporation—needs to be willing to take a stand with their content. We do not live in a world where fence sitters get rewarded on the web. Only the ones with guts and audacity stand out.

Mr. Brown and Race

This past weekend, Danny Brown wrote an article entitled “**Social Media—It's Not Just For White Folks.**” Catchy title? Heck yeah it was. [The article](#) was even better. Most bloggers would have shied away from this topic, but Danny, after reading **Jay Baer's** excellent [article](#) on the same matter, had the guts to tackle an issue most people are scared to death of—**Race**. Well done Danny, well done.

A Movement is Born

Most of you by this point have heard me talk about [HubSpot](#). But what has caused HubSpot's popularity to explode to the point where they are now getting 32 million dollar investments from Google?

Well, although you may hear many reasons for such a telling investment, the main reason, in my opinion, goes back to the company founders, Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah, who took a hard-line opinion and approach to old-school (outbound) marketing from the beginning. Their

thoughts? Well, to put it in a nut shell, *Outbound marketing sucks and Inbound Marketing is the future*.....plain and simple.

Did Brian and Dharmesh get their fair share of criticism with this bold paradigm? Darn right they did, but behind these strong words has grown an entire industry and movement (inbound marketing) that has only begun to see its own potential.

Decision Time

So that's our challenge folks. Let's not be fence sitters with the things we write. Have an opinion. Draw a line in the sand. Call a spade and spade. Will you upset a few people along the way? Of course you will, but this is how movements are started and fans—true fans—are created.

So be bold. Be audacious. And most of all, **Have Guts**.

The Lie that is Online Transparency and “Being True to Self”

A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of participating in a Twitter chat put on by the folks at [Blog World](#) and without question, it was quite an interesting experience. Basically, the chat was more of a “friendly debate” between me and **Jason Falls** (of Social Media Explorer and author of the new book [“No BS Social Media”](#)) on the merits of using curse words/profanity in our online/blogging activities.

As you might imagine, the subject of “*To curse or not to curse*” is always going to be quite polarizing, with strong opinions on each side. This certainly was the case with this Twitter chat, as hundreds of folks participated in the lively but also quite respectful conversation, making it Blog World's most popular Twitter chat to date.

“Being True”

But there was one statement that the “pro-profanity” crowd kept going back to:

If a blogger doesn't curse then they are not being true to themselves.

Hmm, interesting thought.

In fact, I've thought about it a lot more since that night, and have reached a further conclusion about this oft-used phrase that seems to pop up all over the blogosphere.

It's a lie, pure and simple. There is a Proper Time and Place for Everything

My argument throughout the profanity debate was a simple one: It's not about whether profanity is right or wrong, it's about its impact on potential customers, clients, and relationships.

If something we say while we write or present potentially distracts our audience and deters understanding of our message, then why wouldn't we leave it out, especially if we could have stated it in another way and been just as effective??

For example, I consider myself a "religious" guy. But do you know how often I talk about "church" stuff on this blog or in my speaking?

The answer, of course, is very little.

So does this mean I'm not being true to myself? Does this mean I'm not being transparent?

Or how about politics? I'm a political guy. I have strong opinions (even though I never watch TV or listen to talk shows). I have read more books on history and government than most folks do in a lifetime, yet I never mention politics here on TSL or in other presentations.

Again, does this mean I'm not being true to myself? Should I make jokes about the President and other political figures whenever the opportunity presents itself?

No, of course not. That would be dumb, really dumb.

We all filter. Every.....Single.....One.....Of.....Us

Do you talk to your grandparents, parents, or children the same way you do your closest friends? Chances are, you don't. You likely change your vernacular, conversation subjects, etc.

But why? Why are you not being “you” around your family?

I submit you *are* being “you.” Except in this case, you have decided that being true means proper communication, depending on who you’re with.

The same principles hold true for the online world. If every blogger, content marketer, etc. started spouting off every part of their life, their thoughts, their weaknesses, etc.—We’d be in the middle the twilight zone.

This is why there must be balance and common sense used in all our communications.

Transparency

So should we be [transparent with our blogging?](#) Well, considering I’ve probably preached that word as much as anyone online in the past 2 years, the answer is a resounding “Yes”and “No.”

Here’s the way I see it: When it comes to my products, I try to tell all—the good, the bad, and the ugly. I give my most honest opinions, trying never to live in the world of gray, but rather speaking only in black and white terms. This induces trust.

As for the rest, it’s frankly not my goal to alienate/offend/freak out my audience. And if I *am* going to offend them, it sure as heck is going to be because of something I said about inbound marketing, blogging, sales, business, etc. But it’s not going to come from politics, religion, language, why my neighbor thinks I’m crazy, etc.

The bottom line is **we are here to make customers** (at least most of us). If we don’t have them, we don’t make money. If we don’t make money, it doesn’t mean squat how “true to self” we’ve been, because at that point we’re stressed, frustrated, and life stinks.

Hopefully you see that this article isn’t about whether profanity in blogging is right or wrong, as that debate will go on until the end of time. Rather, I simply wanted to put a different spin on this idea of online transparency.

Yes, we need to keep it real. But let’s also be smart, selective, and choose wisely.

7 Ways to Be a Blogging Rebel and Turn Your Industry Upside Down

There is one rule I'm 100% certain of when it comes to blogging, be it business or personal:
We all want to be noticed, seen, and respected.

Some folks act like they don't care about these three words but I honestly feel it's a bunch of bull. Why?

Because if we didn't *really* want to be seen we wouldn't have an **online** blog in the first place for the entire world to see.

I freely admit that like everyone reading this, **I want to be viewed as a thought-leader in my field.** (Why are we embarrassed to admit this btw??) Whether it's swimming pools, inbound marketing, blogging, etc—I want readers.

I want growth.

I want to spark discussion.

I want to force myself and everyone around me to take a stand.

(***Notice here I didn't say I want everyone to *like* me, but that's another point for another day.)
But again, I'm by no means alone, we're all in this boat together.

Despite our overall uniform desires of recognition (of some kind), well over 90% of us fail in this endeavor. When it comes down to the brass tacks, our blogs lack the "it" factor. Notwithstanding all our hard work and efforts, **we miss the mark.** We're left out of the crème that rises to the top.

As I look around the world of business blogging today, and the saturation that is occurring at a faster and faster rate within each industry, I wanted to offer my thoughts on how any of you reading this can stand out from the crowd. How can you, despite the competition, stake your blog's claim as one of the best in your business?

Let's talk about it....

1. Compare Like Mad

Some of you have read before how I've discussed the power of "vs." and "comparison" when it comes to blogging. Without a doubt, this is still the most underutilized and untapped content tool in the world of blogging today.

For example, when I started in the fiberglass pool industry, consumers kept asking me which manufacturers were the best, and which ones I suggested they stay away from. (Similar to someone saying, "Which is better, Ford or Chevy?")

Upon hearing these same questions over and over again, I knew it was my duty as a content marketer (and thought-leader) to put my opinions to pen. So I started writing. Just a few of the articles were:

Viking Fiberglass Pools vs. Trilogy Pools Reviews/Ratings: Which is Better? (Results: 125 inbound links and 13,195 page views)

San Juan vs. Viking Pools Ratings/Reviews: Which is Better? (Results: 22 inbound links and 6050 page views)

Fiberglass Pools vs. Vinyl Liner Pools vs. Concrete Pools: An Honest Comparison (Results: 201 inbound links and 21,577 page views)

With each one of these articles (plus the many, many more I've written), they all rank #1 on Google for their respective key word phrases, and the reason for this SEO domination is very simple: **I was the only one writing them in the industry, and Google appreciates rebels that aren't afraid to write about what others aren't willing to.**

2. Don't Be Bullied by Dinosaurs

I was about 30 years old when I started voicing my opinions online with respect to swimming pools. Most of the leaders in my field were in the +45 crowd. This being said, I was attacked, verbally, a lot. I was also [sent letters](#) from lawyers, a lot.

Before long, I realized an important truth: Many industry leaders and their lawyers are like the big bully on the playground—**If you stand up to them and even punch them in the face, they'll likely run away and their true colors will come out.**

Once I stopped caring about false threats and started realizing I was always within my rights (due

to the fact I was stating the truth), everything changed, and the amount of attention we received as thought-leaders skyrocketed.

3. Question the Way It Has Always Been Done

Don't like the way things are done in your industry?

If so, then **stop complaining and do something about it**. Use the power of words or video to change the status quo. Stand tall and tell everyone why you believe what you believe.

As an example of this, the warranties in the fiberglass swimming pool industry are ridiculous. Full of tricky semantics, some are very, very misleading to consumers.

Seeing this problem, I posted an article entitled: [The Most Egregious Fiberglass Pool Warranty I've Ever Seen](#), and to say this article got much attention and page views would be a mild understatement.

Remember, this applies to every single niche, field, industry, etc., so don't feel you're the exception to the rule.

4. Be 'The Drudge Report' of Your Industry

Whether you're a republican or democrat, you have to respect what **The Drudge Report** has done in terms of building its brand by breaking news and events.

So often on the web, "timing" is everything, which is why your blog should report on the latest events, as they happen, in your industry. If a major manufacturer makes an acquisition, talk about it. If someone files bankruptcy, talk about it. If there is a significant innovation, talk about it.

But remember, the timing to this is critical, so as you see things start to unfold, **get to your computer**.

5. State the Best and Worst

Everyone loves “Best of” and “Worst of” Lists. Surprisingly, most industries don’t have them. Most folks refuse to write about them. Why? Because they’ll get attacked, judged, criticized, etc. Just ask **Jade Craven** who writes ProBlogger’s “[Bloggers to Watch](#)” List every year. Heck, Jade doesn’t even call them the “best bloggers,” she just calls them “worth watching,” yet the article is still anticipated by thousands every year, discussed all around the Internet, and at the same time criticized by many.

Again, this goes back to having an opinion about your industry and putting it out there. Write your opinions down. Tell us why you’ve reached those opinions. And then stand by your claims.

6. Question Authority if You Feel They’re Wrong

What’s the deal with people being afraid to question authority in their fields? I see this everywhere and wonder sometimes if 99% of us have become the sheep that aimlessly follow the shepherd without any rhyme or reason.

Here is a good rule of thumb my friends: **If someone in your industry, especially a leader, says something you don’t agree with, then write about it.**

Got me?

But there is a second part to this: **Don’t be a jerk. Don’t call someone names. Don’t question motives. Just state your opposite opinion with class.**

I’ll give you a couple of examples of exactly what I’m talking about:

I’m sure most of you have heard of **Chris Brogan**, a major authority in the field of social media marketing, Google +, and other areas.

What I love so much about Chris is that because he is always stating what’s on his mind, his findings, and his opinions; I know if I read his blog I’ll likely be moved in one direction or the other in terms of agreement or disagreement.

Chris once discussed on his blog the [merits of asking other people to “share” our online works](#). Because I didn’t agree with his take on the matter, I wrote [this post](#), cordially expressing my differences.

On another occasion, Chris was called out by many for his [Twitter unfollow experiment](#). Considering I thought it was nuts that his actions had affected and polarized so many, again, I wrote an article about it, one that ended up in my top 10 all-time here at **The Sales Lion**, entitled: [Chris Brogan Unfollowed Me on Twitter, and Now I Hate My Whole Life](#).

Yes, this was a very sarcastic article, but my difference of opinion with others, as well as my support for what Chris had done, was well made.

Through these experiences and others, Chris and I have developed a friendship and mutual respect for each other, even though we might not always agree with each other. (Which is a good thing.)

Readers have also noticed I'm not afraid to take on issues or question authorities, all while not being a sheep following a shepherd—something most folks appreciate quite a bit.

7. Lose the Filter (Be Authentic)

Do you remember the day Gary Vaynerchuk made waves across the entire social media industry when he responded to a social media ROI (return on investment) question by stating, **“What’s the ROI of your mother???”**

This one little statement seemed to catch everyone’s attention. Some adored it. Others despised it. But as for me, I elected to focus on the beauty of his unfiltered approach.

What makes Gary Vaynerchuk so appreciated and respected is his lack of filter. (And no, I’m not at all referring to his language here.) **What I mean by this is he isn’t a social media politician.** He doesn’t throw his finger in the wind to see which way it’s blowing. He feels it, he thinks it, then he says it.....and people dig that.

Love ‘em or hate ‘em, we notice Gary Vaynerchuk for this reason.

When It Comes to a Blog Rant, Disclaimers Don’t Exist

If you haven’t read the article entitled, [“Please Don’t Quit Klout. Or At Least Don’t Announce It”](#) by Jason Falls of **Social Media Explorer** this week, you missed one of the best rants, and then resulting discussions, I’ve seen in a long time online.

Without repeating the entire post, I simply want to share the first paragraph, and then we'll get to the quick point of my thoughts here:

“Pardon the rant today, but if I see another melodramatic blog post about how you’re quitting [Klout](#) and canceling your account, I think I might vomit. Doing so not only confirms your ego was so huge that you thought your Klout score mattered in the first place, but trumps that because you’re admitting you’re quitting Klout because, after your score went down, you decided it didn’t matter as much. Poor baby!

Ahh yes, Jason Falls at his finest. I must admit, the guy had me at ‘vomit’ (a word that is still in my “Top 10” after all these years) and gave me a huge chuckle calling people out as “babies.”

The Power of Passion

Personally, I love emotion. I love passion. And I really love that Jason isn’t afraid to say what’s on his mind—a lost art at times in the business of communication.

To say the guy is a thought-leader in this industry of social media would be an understatement.

But it would also be an understatement to say Jason upset a *few* people with his words and ate a little crow because of it.

Without showing every disagreeable comment of the post, the polarizing subject of Klout (and their privacy issues), combined with Jason’s perceived “blanket” statements of folks that had quit the platform, ruffled more than a few feathers.

But while everyone was discussing the merits of Klout and whether or not it’s the end of the world as we know it, I was more interested in Jason’s response to those he’d offended.

More than once Jason replied to those in disagreement:

I think the fact I was ranting was lost on a few folks.....

Yep, that is absolutely true. The first words of the post were “***Pardon the rant.***”

Notwithstanding, this is where I disagree with Jason (as for Klout, I honestly have no opinion

and have no idea what my Klout score is).

Not a Disclaimer

Here is the deal folks: **Ranting does not give a writer, speaker, or communicator more leeway.** Ranting does not act as an asterisk or a disclaimer. The only thing ‘ranting’ says to a reader or listener is, “I’m fired up today, I’m passionate, so put your seat belts on.....”

Again, I love a good rant. I also love it when people have guts enough to strongly say how they feel.

But if you say it, you now *own* it.

If you’re a business, and you slander another business or product in a blog post or some other medium, can you tell a judge, “It was just a rant.....”?

If you’re a millionaire named Dan Gilbert, and you own the Cleveland Cavaliers, and LeBron James leaves your team; does a “rant” give you a free pass from the public and press when you verbalize James’ “cowardly betrayal” and [bash him](#) whenever you get the chance?

The examples go on and on, but I’m sure you already see my point.

So should you be passionate and opinionated? Yes, absolutely. If you’re not inducing some type of emotion with your audience, there is a good chance they simply won’t remember who you are and what you’ve said.

But please, whatever you do, don’t think saying, “It was a rant” will limit the consequences.

Long Tail Keywords: The Greatest Key to Business Blogging Success

Most small business blogs stink. I’m sorry if that offends you. Fact is, it’s true. There are many reasons for it, but none more important than what I want to briefly talk about and then show you (via video) today.

A few months ago, I wrote a blog about [long-tail keywords and what they are](#). Although I don't want to go into too much depth here regarding this "low hanging fruit" of the world wide web, suffices to say that long tail keywords consist of longer phrases (usually at least 3 words or more) that Internet searches are entering in order to find more specific data regarding a particular niche. Here is an example: Short Tail: Chicken; Medium Tail: Rotisserie Chicken; Long Tail: How to Prepare Rotisserie Chicken

Because Internet users are becoming more and more adroit at searching and finding information online, the floodgates are wide open for any businesses that is able to aggressively go after these "longer phrases" and beat others to the punch.

This process of developing a killer small business blog and dominating your niche via the long-tail is not as hard as it might sound, and in my opinion really only requires 3 essential qualities:

1. Think Like a Homeowner.
2. Write Homeowner Friendly Blog Titles and Articles
3. Consistency in Post Frequency

Business owners and employees have a big problem when it comes to content marketing: they often think like business owners and employees. You may snicker at this but it's absolutely true. The curse of knowledge can kill anyone's ability to speak at the level of their audience.

In order to overcome this problem, the most important exercise a business owner or content marketer can do for his or her blog is to sit down and write the 20 most prominent questions consumers ask regarding his or her product. These questions formulate perfect titles for blog articles and combined with solid content and regularity (post at least twice a week), a blog's traffic will quickly skyrocket because of its consumer-centric appeal. If you haven't ever done this exercise, stop putting it off. **It works.**

Remember: Any question, and I really mean ANY, that a consumer asks regarding a product or service is worth writing about. And it's the businesses that are most aware of these questions that end up producing the best content for search engines and eventually garnering the most viewers.

I can say this because my swimming pool blog is easily the most popular in its industry. Also, our traffic is in the 99th percentile for swimming pool companies. So by simply going after longer phrases with our blog articles (thinking like consumers), we've been able to bypass other companies that are multi-million dollar operations. In fact, our traffic is so prolific throughout the United States and Canada that I'm now partnering up with consumer-lead services because

we get a mountain of leads outside of our consumer area and I just hate throwing them all away.

Low Hanging Fruit, Long Tail Keywords, and How to Dominate the Big Boys

Almost one year ago to the day, I, like most small businesses trying to break into the world of Search Engine Optimization, felt like a man at the bottom of Mount Everest, looking up into the clouds and wondering how I could possibly get to the top. And when I say top, I mean website traffic, and lots of it.

I wanted to be the site other companies in my industry looked up to when they set their traffic goals. I wanted to be the industry standard, the example, the hub of consumer information.....But the task was going to be difficult, and even worse, I was attempting to climb a mountain – for the first time.

As all my readers are well aware, I own (along w/ two partners) a fiberglass swimming pool installation company. In terms of web traffic within this industry, fiberglass pool manufacturers dominate. Why? Mainly because their Google page rank is so high with two simple phrases: “fiberglass pools” and “fiberglass pool.” Those two words garner over 20,000 searches a month on Google and therefore catapult the manufacturers to the top, with most builders like me lagging way behind.

Why Small Biz Web Traffic Stinks

In fact, the majority of pool builders get very, very little web traffic. And when I say very little, I mean between 10-20 unique visitors a day.....if that. The reasons for this are many but the main cause of the problem reverts back to poor SEO practices—As I’ve mentioned ad nauseam on this blog, most builders have awful websites. They don’t offer the consumer remarkable content. They don’t teach. They don’t inform. Essentially, the sites are glorified business cards.

But this problem within the swimming pool industry is no different than 90% of other small businesses around the world. Carpenters, plumbers, builders, electricians, home improvement companies—they are all the same. When it comes to web traffic and web lead generation, they stink. In fact, many of these companies depend on their suppliers and manufacturers to give them all their leads. And if they ain’t getting leads from their manufacturers, they immediately turn to Google Adwords and start throwing money their way. Needless to say, it’s a nasty cycle.

Less Dependency

Luckily, when I started this process about a year ago, I understood this cycle for what it was, and

I didn't want any part of it. In fact, if there is one thing I learned a long time ago in business it's the more a small business is dependent on "others" for lead creation and generation, the more they're in trouble. I didn't want to ever sit at my desk and wait for my pool manufacturer to send me a lead. In fact, I wanted to beat *them* to the leads. Frankly, I wanted to beat all the manufacturers to the leads. This is what my SEO quest has been all about.

As I've mentioned before, this quest started with blogging. My initial blogging goals were simple: I wanted to get on the first page with the words "fiberglass pools" and "fiberglass pool."

After the first few articles though, I realized my positioning with those two words weren't really moving. In fact, the blog seemed to be a failure. I was bummed.

Common Sense Blogging

My experience was nothing unique though. Many bloggers, especially small biz bloggers, deal with a sense of hopelessness at the beginning of blogging escapades. We live in a society of *results*. And we want *fast* results at that. Unfortunately, blogs don't typically work that way. But with lots of persistence mixed in with common sense, blogs can take any business' SEO results to new heights.

And what do I mean by common sense? I mean that you need to start blogging to *answer questions of consumers*. Stop thinking like a business owner or marketer and start thinking just as a consumer would. This is why you should make a list today of the top 20 questions a consumer asks when they are considering the purchase of your product. These questions will form the foundation of your Long-Tail Keyword strategy, or as I like to put it, your business' *Low-Hanging Fruit*.

Low Hanging (SEO) Fruit

The website [Wisegeek](#) gives a nice explanation of low-hanging fruit:

We have Mother Nature to thank for the expression *low-hanging fruit*. A fruit-bearing tree often contains some branches low enough for animals and humans to reach without much effort. The fruit contained on these lower branches may be not be as ripe or attractive as the fruit on higher limbs, but it is usually more abundant and easier to harvest. From this we get the popular expression "low hanging fruit," which generally means selecting the easiest targets with the least amount of effort.

This concept of low-hanging fruit is the whole reason my company's blog eventually exploded. Instead of worrying about more difficult keywords such as "fiberglass pools," I started focusing on questions/topics regarding fiberglass pools that consumers would be asking themselves and

therefore turning to Google for answers. In the world of SEO, these phrases are what's known as "Long Tail Keywords." There are also short and mid-tail keywords. An example of this would be: "Pools"—Short Tail "Fiberglass Pools"—Mid Tail "What are some sizes of fiberglass pools?" – Long Tail

Do you see the difference? Obviously, long-tail keywords are much more targeted and specific, which is what makes them so wonderful. Just look at it this way, which customer/lead would you rather have, the person that found your website (Let's assume you sell and install cabinets) by typing in "Cabinets" or the person that typed in the phrase "How much do mahogany cabinets cost installed?" I'm sure you'd choose the second, as such a phrase would indicate the high level of seriousness of the shopper.

The beauty of blogging is that you could easily write an article entitled, "How Much do Mahogany Cabinets Cost Installed?" and I can practically guarantee it would quickly move to the front page of Google for that keyword phrase, simply because the competition for such a word is so low.

It Only Takes One Great Article

Let me give you an example from my business. My partner Jason once wrote an article entitled, "Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions." Immediately, this article captured the first spot on Google for many long-tail keyword phrases such as: "*Fiberglass Pool Problems*," "*Problems with Fiberglass Pools*," and many others (Type a few in your search engine and see what I'm talking about).

And although such phrases might not register that high for monthly searches on Google, the blog article has now been read over 5,000 times this past year. Think about that for a second.....The average pool builder gets about 5,000 visits a year on their website and this ONE article garnered our website over 5,000 views alone! Now that's what I call some low-hanging fruit.

The "Fiberglass Pool Problems" article is just one example of many long-tail keyword phrases we've written about since we started thinking like a consumer. This is also why, even though we STILL are not on the first page of Google for "Fiberglass Pools," our site traffic has now moved well past every fiberglass pool manufacturer in our industry. While they've been fighting over the attractive fruit that is higher in the tree, we've snatched as much of the low-hanging fruit off of every branch we could find, and we now stand at the top of the traffic mountain that, just under one year ago, seemed insurmountable.

Your Turn

Hopefully you can see just how simple a strategy this is. It doesn't require you to be an SEO genius. And it doesn't require a bunch of money. In fact, it only requires 3 things: A business

blog

Write at least 2 articles a week

Start thinking and acting like a customer

That's it. That's all it takes. And I can promise you that if you do these things your site's traffic, along with your company's leads and sales, will reach heights you never imagined possible.

10 Reasons Why Your Blog Will Die Before Its First Birthday

Strong title, huh? Well, to be honest, it was meant to be. In fact, take a second and have hard look around here at *Bloggish Bookshelf*. How many different blogs/authors do you see between all the comments, mentions, shares, etc? No doubt, there is a bunch. Heck, Tristan's site has practically become a Mecca of writers from around the globe, all enthusiastically engaged in the blogosphere. But sadly, 12 months from now, many of the bloggers shown here will be an afterthought—a simple avatar coming from a once thriving site that now sits dormant, just waiting to dissipate into that cloud we all know as “the Internet.”

As a professional blogger for two years now, I've actively engaged in the blogosphere and watched many writers come and go. In fact, if I had to make an educated guess, I'd venture to say that less than 10% of all blogs live to see their first birthday. Quite sad, isn't it?

So the question is why? Why do so many “inspired” individuals go through the process of starting a blog, writing content, engaging in “the community”—only to fade away? Although there are certainly many reasons as to why this phenomena occurs year in and year out, I've come up with my top 10:

10 Reasons Why Your Blog Will Die Before Its First Birthday

1. **No Core Motivation:** If I had to ask you right now what the #1 purpose for your blog was, what would you say? (Oh, and you must be very specific with your answer)..... I've personally asked this question to countless bloggers over these last 2 years and I'm always amazed at how few people truly know the core reason why they are doing this. Some say money, others might say community, others might say SEO—the list of vague answers goes on and on. In all of these cases though, I find that most bloggers have to “think” about why they are doing what they're doing. Here's a tip for ya folks:

If you need to think about the core reason why you blog, then you're already up a creek.....

That's right; you shouldn't have to think about it. The answer should be right there, just waiting to be shared with anyone who wants to know.

I'll use my own example for a second. Why do I blog on The Sales Lion? Because I'm going to write a New York Times bestseller, that's why. What, you think that's a silly answer? For many, I'm sure it is. But for me, I came to understand years back that I have an internal desire to reach and teach as many people as possible. I see guys like Seth Godin, Steven Covey and others and I think—"That's my calling. That's my mission. That's where I'm headed." I also understand that the quickest way for me to get there is through my blogging platform. This is my core motivation, and all of the other benefits/reasons are secondary.

2. Money is your first priority: This goes along with #1 but easily the biggest reason why bloggers burn out quickly is because they've read some crazy promise online about how easy Internet marketing is and all of the sudden they've got dollar signs dancing in their head. Look folks, I'm the first person to say that making money online is a wonderful thing, but if it's your core motivation, you're already in trouble. Remember, the only motivation that lasts is the stuff that comes from within (your passions), not the stuff that comes from the outside (all that other stuff).

3. You're really not that passionate about your niche: Yes, I know, a common theme is developing here. But seriously, how many times have you heard someone talk about how they got burnt out on their "niche sites" because they really weren't passionate about what they were doing? Personally, I can't even start to imagine writing about stuff that doesn't get my juices flowing. It makes no sense and it's a dead end road.

Blogging is hard work. It often times requires great sacrifice, especially for those of us that have other jobs and responsibilities. I don't know how many times I've gotten home late at night and looked at the clock and saw it was past 12am yet, because of passion, was able to muster the energy and enthusiasm I needed to start hitting the letters on my keyboard.

4. You're expectations are too high: We all want more traffic. We all want quick results. But the reality is that neither typically occurs unless you're some blogging nut with the initials T.H. The desire to garner better stats and more traffic is great, but if you go into blogging thinking it'll happen quickly then you're just setting yourself up for failure and disappointment.

In my case, The Sales Lion took about a year to really get going. In fact, it wasn't until this past January where things exploded. And how did I react during those months of hard work, dedication, and late nights? Simply put, I just kept moving forward. Although there were clearly

moments of frustration, I knew results would come, if I only held the course.

5. You're too focused on traffic: Again, very similar to #4 but if you're looking at your site's stats more than twice a day, I submit you're going overboard. I've heard of people checking their traffic stats every 10 minutes throughout a day. Are you kidding me? The problem with such a behavior is that the more you focus on "stats," the less focus and energy you have for "creation."

And, as any successful blogger will tell you, your ability to think of and create new content on a consistent basis is an absolute key to success.

6. Your networking stinks: I've talked about this quite a bit lately simply because one of the biggest reasons why my blog didn't take off for months was due to a serious lack of networking. At first, all I did was produce content, and the results showed—low traffic and few subscribers. It was rather depressing at times. But over the last few months I've completely changed my approach. I'm constantly looking for ways to mention other bloggers, promote their stuff, and add value to their community. And the results? I've now built incredible relationships with some amazing people and my traffic has increased by about 500%.

7. You're not a 'relaxed' writer: What is a relaxed writer? It's someone that knows who he or she is and simply allows their thoughts to flow onto the screen. A relaxed writer doesn't analyze each and every word of his blog. Nor does he suffer from self-doubt and critical analysis. And he certainly doesn't care if others think he is right or wrong.

I've had bloggers tell me before that an 800 word post took them 3 hours to write. What?? Are you serious? Look, I'm all for producing good, clean content, but paralysis by analysis is a very bad thing. My advice is simple: Stop thinking so hard and just type, the rest will just fall into place.

8. Your niche is too dang narrow: Just because you love a subject doesn't mean you'll be able to write about it, week in and week out, for years to come. For example, when I started The Sales Lion, I thought its focus would be on retail sales. Well, that lasted about 3 weeks until I quickly realized my focus was way too narrow, and I had a wealth of business and life experience that needed to come out. Today, the blog is all about sales, marketing, technology, small business, life, etc. And because it's such a broad (yet still focused) niche, I have an almost unlimited supply of new ideas coming at me daily for fresh content.

9. You're Lazy: I had to include this one. If you're not self-motivated, blogging ain't for you. I know such a statement may sound judgmental, but that's because it is. Lazy people make for terrible bloggers.

10. You have no plan: To finish off our little list, I simply want to state that every blogger must have a plan. For example, Seth Godin writes every day. His posts go live every morning at 6:25am. He writes short articles, in a frank manner, and he makes a challenge to his readers in every article. This is Seth's style and it works for him. He knows who he is and he's dang good at being Seth Godin.

Every person's style should be their own. But regardless of individuality, you should know what yours is. How often will you post? What days? What's the most ideal post-length for you? How much time will you spend networking? If you can come up with and stick to a plan that answers these and other similar questions, you'll be way ahead of the game and your blog will benefit greatly.

The Most Common Business Blogging and SEO Mistake in the World

Over the past week, because of my guest post on [Social Media Examiner](#) and due to the increased traffic here on **The Sales Lion**, I've had the opportunity to look at 28 business blogs that are doing their best to embrace this thing we call **Content Marketing**.

Yet out of these 28, I'd say 26 are making the same mistake again and again and again. In fact, because I keep writing the same diagnosis to business owners I figured I should start using my brain and simply write a post on the subject.

It All Comes Down to Goals

But let me just cut to the chase by making this critical statement, one I earnestly hope you will take to heart for your business' blog from today forward:

If you don't have a keyword phrase goal for *every* blog post you ever write, you're missing the boat.

In other words, if I looked at your company's last 10 blog posts, from the title of the post alone could I clearly tell what your target keyword goal was for that post??

Yep, that's the magical question, the one that 26 out of 28 blogs this past week clearly cannot answer.

People constantly send me emails wondering why they are getting little traffic with their blog posts. Usually, within seconds of looking at their writings, the problems jump off the page.

The Problem with Terrible Post Titles

Although there are some core SEO problems that most folks suffer from, terrible post titles takes the cake again and again and again.

There is a little debate as to whether or not blog titles should be more “witty” (written to attract readers) or more “SEO oriented” (written to attract the search engines).

I submit that it’s usually possible to achieve both, but for over 99% of all blogs in this world that have very few subscribers, **SEO in the title should be the first priority**. The reason for this is simple—**SEO is the gift that keeps on giving**. When you rank on the first page of Google for a particular keyword phrase, the new business and customers that can come from that one post can literally last for years to come. (I’ve experienced this many, many times.)

This is why most folks need to **quit with the witty titles that make no SEO sense and start enriching said titles with a keyword phrase**, preferably one of the [long-tail](#).

For example, here is a really dumb blog title:

“The Big Secret Your Pool Guy is Not Telling You”

(As you might imagine, no one is typing in Google the keyword phrase “big secrets from pool guys.”)

Now take the same blog post, and change the title to:

“The Most Egregious Fiberglass Pool Warranty I’ve Ever Seen”

The second title is not only keyword rich (fiberglass pool warranty), but it’s very attractive to readers as well. (It also ranks on the first page of Google for the phrase, as it’s an article on my swimming pool site.)

Real Life Examples: Can You Guess the Keyword Goals?

Let me show you some real life examples of what I'm talking about here. Although I don't always write titles for SEO here on **The Sales Lion**, many do have a keyword goal. With my swimming pool company, EVERY article has a keyword goal. (Remember** Because I have so many subscribers here on TSL and it's more of a "social" niche, I can have more of a mix. With swimming pools not being a "social" niche, it's all about the SEO). I'm going to show you a blog post, and see if you can guess what the targeted keyword phrases were with each (before I tell you the answer below each image).



Keyword Goals: "HubSpot Reviews" (#3 on Google Currently), "HubSpot Customer Reviews" (#5 Google Currently)

The 13 Best and Most Powerful Blog Header Designs on the Internet

by MARCUS SHERIDAN



Over the past few days, I've looked at hundreds of websites and blog headers. I

started with **Brankica Underwood's** incredible list of 199 blogs you should be reading and worked my way from there. And as I looked around, the more I realized this sad reality—**Most blog headers fail to induce any emotion and connection with the blog, and it's a shame.**

97

46

Tweet

Share

Keyword Goals: “Blog Headers” (#3 on Google Currently) “Best Blog Headers” (#3 Google) “Blog Headers Designs” (#2 Google)

The Most Important Small Business Video Marketing Tip You'll Ever Receive

by MARCUS SHERIDAN



While speaking at the Hubspot User Group conference last month, a kind lady in the crowd asked me the following question:

“Marcus, what are your thoughts on video? I read all of this stuff that I ‘have to do’ and I feel overwhelmed just getting started.”

300

30

Tweet

Share

Keyword Goals: “Small Business Video Marketing Tips” (Currently #1 on Google)

Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions

Posted by Jason Hughes

Like1

Tweet1

+11

inShare

By Jason Hughes

If you're considering the purchase of an inground fiberglass pool and done any research on the web, you've probably come in contact with some discussion of the problems associated with fiberglass pools. The purpose of this article is to address, with full disclosure, five of the most common problems associated with

Keyword Goals: “Fiberglass Swimming Pool Problems” (#1 Google), “Fiberglass Pool Problems” (#1 Google)

How Much do Above Ground and Inground Swimming Pools Cost?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan

Like2

Tweet0

+11

inShare

How much do Above Ground and Inground Swimming Pools Cost?

By Marcus Sheridan



One of the first questions a pool shopper asks themselves when they begin the process of buying a swimming pool is: How much does a pool cost, and what are the expected prices for the different types of

Keyword Goals: “Inbound Pool Cost” (#3 Google), “Above Ground Pool Cost” (#3 Google), “How much do Inground Pools Cost?” (#1 Google), “How much do above ground pools cost?” (#1 Google)

State Your Keyword Goals and Watch the Results Follow

Hopefully, as you looked at each one of these blog titles, the keyword goal(s) of each became immediately obvious. This is exactly how it should be for your company blog. Remember, the key is that you always have a clear goal. Once you establish this one little habit, you'll notice

your organic search visit traffic will start to go up and you'll rank for more and more keywords with each post.

13 Guaranteed Ways to Blog and Be Totally Miserable

I hate blogging. It stinks. No, better stated, it really, really stinks. Whether it's your personal blog or the blog for your small business, the whole idea of content production ain't no fun. In fact, in my quest to make sure you know how to get the least amount of enjoyment out of this journey so as to experience the stresses and frustrations that come my way each and every day, I've come up with the following ground-breaking list. Here goes folks.....

13 Guaranteed ways to be a Miserable Blogger

1. Choose a Topic You Have No Passion For: Why on Earth would you ever want to spend hours and hours of your life writing about something that you actually *care* about?? Think about this for a second: It's 1am and you've got a post due the next day. Would you rather talk about something that really, really gets you jazzed up or would you prefer to drudge through another article about something you've grown to hate on one of your silly niche sites?? I don't know about you, but I'll take the niche sites!

2. Do It For the Money Baby: Ahh, for the love of the green paper.....that's what I'm saying! It always thrills me when I'm approached by people interested in starting a blog and the first thing they speak of is just how much money XYZ niche can make them. Yes, such words are music to my ears as I know all the money in the world absolutely stinks as a motivator, especially when it comes to that crazy and frivolous thing called "inspired writing."

3. Don't Comment: Why would you want to waste your time and effort commenting on another person's site?? Look people, if readers don't want to comment on your site, forget 'em. You don't need them anyway. So never, ever waste your time making others feel good through comments. Plus, if you do, they may actually come back on your blog and have nice things to say.....This would be very bad, as it could make you smile, maybe even make you want to start making friends and things like that. Again, all a waste of time and there's no way you'll be miserable with such personal interactions.

4. Don't Share: This goes along with #3. Look ladies and gents, if you want to be mad and frustrated with your blog the last thing you want to do is risk others reading your work and sharing it with their friends and network. This being said, don't ever share, tweet, "like," or any of that other junk. Focus on YOU. It ain't about THEM. Trust me, nothing makes me feel worse than seeing my TweetMeMe button with anything but a big, fat ZERO next to it.

5. Don't Mention Others: When you write a post, never, ever look for opportunities to mention and link back to other bloggers. If you lose your mind and start linking back to other people's sites they might catch wind of this and actually visit your site.....or even worse they might even send you an email thanking you for the mention.

6. Don't EVER Contact Someone Directly: As I just mentioned, direct contact can be quite damaging to your miserable level. You see, a direct contact with someone via email or a medium like Skype can take what is a general "acquaintance" and lead to something much greater.....like that nasty word "friendship." And as we all know, it's hard to be miserable when you're too busy making new friends all over the world that are ready and willing to help you in any way they can.....Yikes, the sound of such a thing makes me quiver!

7. Don't Have a Writing Plan: In our continued quest to be miserable, it's critical that we're never able to "get comfortable" with our blog. That's why set plans like "I will post every Monday and Thursday" are a very bad thing. On the other hand, never having any clue when you're going to write and possibly missing weeks at a time simply because "you got too busy" are great ways to get frustrated with your blog.

8. Don't Delegate: Why in the world would you want help with your blog? This is especially true for a company where there are many employees and therefore the potential for many content producers. Because delegation leads to a stress-free blog with tons of unique content, one must learn to depend on no one. This way your work load will be too much to bear and you'll be stressed each week as you try to find time to write your next article. Won't that be fun!

9. Don't Converse: I can't stand it when I see bloggers actually taking the time to reply to each and every comment left on their blog. Seriously, if you're looking to be mad at the world why on Earth would you bother engaging in healthy, productive conversation with your readers??? It makes no sense people!

10. Don't Use Personal Experiences: [Personal experiences](#) are the bane of my existence. They lead to happy thoughts and reader engagement—two actions that any miserable blogger like me want no parts of. I see these writers out there using personal experiences in their stories all the time and yapping off how their posts only take 30 minutes to write and they're smiling the whole time. Talk about gag me with a spoon!

11. Don't Use CommentLuv, ReplyMe, and other Plugins: Any time a plugin cross-promotes other blogs and enhances better communication, we have a problem. CommentLuv and [ReplyMe](#) are two such plugins that everyone is talking about and they both make me sick. Whatever you do, don't use them!!

12. Don't Write at the Level of Your Readers: Why would you want your readers to actually understand what you have to say? Don't you think you'll be way more miserable if you talk down to them and [use a vernacular](#) that's well above their level?? Of course you would, so try it!

13. Whatever You Do, Don't Smile: I had to end with this one. I never write with a smile. In fact, I frown and squint my eyes and sometimes even yell at my computer. Talk about feeling awful.....these actions work great!

The Best Blog Posting Schedule Ever: Finally, Proof and Real Numbers!

If you've been blogging for more than, well, like 2 days, then the idea of a proper posting schedule has assuredly crossed your mind at one time or another, and for good reason too—your posting schedule can make or break this entire experience for you, your readers, and your ability to have huge success with this wild endeavor you've chosen to participate in. But finally, after thousands of hours of deep investigation, split testing, and intensive interviews, you shall now learn what is clearly the **best blog posting schedule in the online world today**.....<insert drum roll please>

Gini Dietrich, Spin Sucks (8+ articles weekly)

If you want to talk about successful blog posting schedules, **Gini Dietrich** is setting the pace in a major way. By publishing two articles most weekdays (one by Gini and another guest post), plus an occasional one on the weekends, the people at [Spin Sucks](#) show that tons of posts and great quality lead to huge community (Have you seen the sick number of comments that chick gets when she simply says “boo” to her readers??). Having racked up huge “blogging-miles” over the past few years, Gini has managed to garner thousands of subscribers, and quite the rabid community, with cool people like [Sean McGinnis](#) serving as content body guards.

Not only that, but Spin Sucks has also managed to do very well with organic search terms (having so much content) and the blog has, in many ways, become the beacon of the PR community.

When I asked Gini why she posts so much on SS, her response was simple: “We’ve run the numbers, and they’re much better since we started posting twice daily.”

Enough said , Gini Dietrich has the best blog posting schedule in the world.

Shonali Burke, Waxing Unlyrical (6-7 articles weekly)

At the recent event at Blog World New York I had an experience with **Shonali Burke** that made me smile. We had both showed up about 30 minutes early for a keynote and what was so funny is that as soon as she sat down, she said “I’ve got to get tomorrow’s post done!” and then immediately opened up her laptop, cracked her knuckles, and started typing away with a focus and vigor that would make any blogger grin.

So there Shonali and I sat, racing against the time constraints of the day to produce content and publish another post for our awesome communities. It was kinda cool actually.....

On her blog [Waxing Unlyrical](#), Shonali posts, at least most weeks, one article a day, and she’s very serious about this posting schedule. And who can blame her? She has become a sought after social media/marketing consultant and has quite an impressive community that follows her blog.

Considering this, it’s obvious that Shonali Burke has the best blog post schedule in the world.

Danny Brown (3-4 articles weekly)

Would you like 6,000 loyal subscribers to your blog? I sure as heck would!!! Well folks, **Danny Brown** has just that on his [amazing blog](#) that discusses social media, PR, marketing, business, etc. And how often does Danny post? Although this is not a set answer, he generally posts 3-4 times a week, as inspiration hits.

With this schedule, Danny doesn’t overwhelm his readers with too much content and is able to have quite an active conversation with each article. It also means consistently high quality every time while garnering leads for his impressive marketing company, [Bonsai Interactive](#).

For these reasons and more, Danny Brown has the best blogging schedule in the world.

Mufasa/Marcus/TSL Guy/ Lion Dude/ The Mane Man/Etc. (2 articles weekly)

Ok, I admit it; I just had to work myself into the mix here with all this talk about blog posting

schedules!! Seriously though, as most of you already know, here on TSL I post, at least most of the time, 2 articles a week, and here are my main reasons:

1. I write based on life experience, and I want the stuff to be good, not just OK. I also want to feel inspired, not forced. Two articles a week is the perfect balance for this.
2. By waiting 3 days between posts, readers know that I'm not going to be slamming more content down their throats tomorrow, and so they have the opportunity to come back the next day or later. This is also why I get so many comments on day 2, 3, and even 4 on my posts. As I've stated before, I believe everyone should allow their articles to "simmer," and gain momentum by so doing.
3. Because I have such an interactive community here on TSL, if I write too much I'll get less engagement with each post. I don't want to be overbearing with my content. As I told my good friend [John Falchetto](#), too much of anything, no matter how good it might be, can get old.
4. Writing is never a burden or chore with my posting schedule. For me, this is perfect, and I love what I do.

For these 4 reasons and others I don't simply have the time to include, *I* clearly have the best blog posting schedule on the Internet.

JK Allen : Hustler's Notebook (1 article per week)

Ahhh yes, the venerable **JK Allen**, master of [Hustler's Notebook](#). Ever wondered if it was possible to blog just once a week and still build a huge audience of fans, followers, and community? Just visit JK's site and you'll see exactly what one looks like.

JK is an amazing dude. Not only does he have a normal "9-5 job," but he also actively coaches his children in sports, takes many trips with his family, comments heavily on other blogs around the blogosphere, and maintains a schedule that most people would find simply inconceivable. But if you look at JK's strategy, it's clear why his once a week post schedule works so well for him:

1. Each article is loaded with quality. They're long and thought-provoking, and it's obvious upon reading the first paragraph of anything he writes that the guy doesn't just publish regurgitated junk.

2. Although JK has awesome content, he is the most original blogger on the web when it comes to graphics. In every post, JK manages to include an image with his trademark ‘HN’ symbol, which stands for **Hustler’s Notebook** (if you haven’t noticed this, [check it out](#), it’s stinking awesome!). Creating art this awesome takes time, so therefore JK knows if he were to write more often, his incredible graphics/branding would suffer.

3. JK has branded himself as one of the best commenters and networkers in the entire blogosphere. Instead of spending all this time writing, he spends much of it building relationships with other bloggers by commenting, sharing, talking on Skype , calling someone on the phone, etc.

With well over 100 comments on almost every post and growth that would make Seth Godin jealous, it’s obvious that JK Allen has the best blogging schedule in the world.

The Road to Finding YOUR Posting Schedule

OK, I’m sure you’ve gotten my point, haven’t you? Yep, that’s right, **there is NO perfect blogging schedule**. Actually, better stated, there is—the one that allows you to accomplish your goals and love every minute of this wonderful act we call blogging.

Of all the bloggers above, the one trait that each one has in common regarding posting schedule is this—They’ve all developed, changed, and come to know their best writing schedule **over time**. In other words, this isn’t something they just knew overnight. As is the case with every blogger, it takes time, sometimes years, to reach this point.

When I hear brand new bloggers talk about set posting schedules I can’t help but to crack a little smile, especially for the ones that think they’re going to post every day. Not that there is anything wrong with such a schedule, but the key points to remember are this:

1. Allow your schedule to change, as you change, over time. Listen to yourself, your audience, and the analytics Google is giving you to develop your plan.

2. Do not set a blogging schedule just because someone else told you it was a good idea.

3. There is no truth in the statement , “*XYZ niche bloggers should post at least X times per week.*” (I hear this statement in different industries and it makes me seriously shake my head at just how misguided some “experts” are.)

4. Have some fun, will ya?

5 Small Business Blogging Myths Most “Experts” Don’t Understand

We’ve all heard them—the do’s and don’ts of blogging. The “secrets” that will take your personal or company blog to new heights of greatness or, if done poorly, valleys of “traffic despair.” And although much of what is taught as general rule in the public forum is good, small businesses must come to understand certain *myths* that surround this sometimes rewarding and other times frustrating animal we call content marketing and blogging.

So let’s just get right to it. I wanted to take the time today to discuss what 2 years of blogging for various businesses has taught me and hopefully it will inspire some of you to possibly take your blog and company website to new heights in 2011. Here goes:

Top 5 Small Business Blogging Myths

1. Guest Posting is the Key to Success and a Larger Audience

Ahh yes, the lovely concept of “guest posting.” Let me just say here I’m a huge fan of guest posting. In certain applications, it’s awesome. But frankly, there are simply some industries where it’s not worth a rip.

As an example, in two weeks I’ll be guest posting on the extremely popular blog “[Men with Pens](#).” Because the blog has a huge following of people that are passionate about writing and blogging, it’s the perfect fit, and will surely garner my site hundreds of visitors and many subscribers that otherwise would not have ever taken a trip over here to The Sales Lion.

But let’s switch gears for a second. Another blog I write teaches people the ins and outs of inground swimming pools. When I started blogging in the swimming pool industry 2 years ago, guess how many companies actually understood what true blogging/content marketing was? If you guess ZERO, you’re about right. Yeah, sure there were some decent websites out there, but none were based on Web 2.0 principles. In other words, I couldn’t have done a guest post if I wanted to, and if I had, it wouldn’t have been read by anyone nor garnered me any additional traffic.

So it really comes down to your niche. Chances are though, if it’s a blue collar niche you’re in

there are likely very few successful content marketers (which is good).

2. SEO is Difficult to Achieve

Again, this depends on the niche. Most people want to simply blanket search engine optimization as a difficult strategy only accomplished through the strategic use of keywords and a mountain of anchor text links coming back to one's site.

The reality is that most industries are still up for the taking when it comes to garnering web traffic through the search engines. Why? Because there just aren't many smart content marketers out there that are speaking "consumer: speak versus "nerd speak."

Going back to my swimming pool blog, over the past 2 years I haven't spent one second on guest posting, link building, or anything of that nature. What I have done though is write articles that answer specific consumer questions, exactly as the consumer would understand and read them. The strategy has paid some major dividends and is why it's the #1 swimming pool blog in the world today.

3. Commenting on Other Blogs Is/Is Not Important

Notice how I said here "Is/Is not" important. That's because depending on who you talk to, commenting on other blogs is either a great traffic building strategy or a waste of time. Well ladies and gentlemen, again this one comes down to your niche and industry (notice a common theme?). For example, the self improvement/blogging/SEO industry is full of people that read various blogs. And because they are such avid blog readers, the more a writer can be seen in the public as "participating in the conversation" the more chance they have of gaining fans and followers. In fact, the biggest mistake I made on this blog in its first 6 months was the fact that I did not understand this critical concept and rarely commented on other blogs.

But the reality is that I only did this based on what I'd learned in the swimming pool industry. When I started The Sales Lion I figured I'd garner enough traffic by giving readers great content that was keyword (SEO) related. But within a few months I realized that some industries are really dang competitive, whereas others are not. Although I could gain a huge following on my pool blog by simply producing great content, I had to learn Twitter, networking, commenting, etc in order to make The Sales Lion a success.

4. RSS is Used by Everyone

I'm shocked at how many bloggers in the web/blogging/SEO industry do not have "**Subscribe**

by Email” buttons on their site. The reason for this is simple—Bloggers are suffering from the *curse of knowledge* and assuming that everyone knows what an RSS feeder is, which is nuts.

To give a better example of this, on my swimming pool blog 90% of the subscribers are through email, and only 10% are with RSS. Compare that to The Sales Lion where the exact opposite is true—80% RSS and about 20% email.

My point here is that consumers make an industry and niche what it is. With many older, non-technical folks in their 50s, the swimming pool industry will be mainly email subscription based for at least another 5-10 years until RSS crosses over to more “non-technical” households.

5. Blogging is a Waste of Time for Location-Based Businesses

This one really gets me going. You see, there are some people that feel content marketing/blogging is a waste for a small business that has a finite area of coverage. To be completely frank, whoever makes such a statement is a total idiot and has no idea what they’re talking about.

My swimming [pool company](#) only builds pools in Virginia and Maryland, yet we write a blog that teaches the entire world about our product and industry. Because of this, many people have asked me in the past why I focus on getting all that traffic even though a large portion of the visitors are not in my area. There are many answers for this question, but the main 2 are this:

Blogs aren’t just about producing search engine traffic. They teach, build trust, and ultimately earn sales with existing customers and persons in your sales funnel. Out of 500 visitors that come to my site, if only 30 are in my area but came to the site because of a search engine query stemming from my blog, it was more than worth it, as those 30 visitors never would have found me otherwise.

Although I could go on and on about this subject I’m sure you’ve picked up on the theme of this article. **Every industry, and therefore every blog, is different.** And because they are different, there isn’t a “one size fits all” approach to generating traffic and sales. The key is constant action, experimentation, and the ability to adjust as the times dictate.

Do “Top Blogger Lists” Really Mean Anything At All?

So here I sit, really not knowing how to start this. Frankly, it’s one of those subjects that I know needs to be written about but also has the opportunity to be greatly misunderstood. But due to the

fact that I don't have a witty opening line to grab your attention, I'll just say what's on my mind:
Top Blogger Lists mean everything.....and they mean nothing.

There, so I said it, and now I'll hopefully make some sense of it.

They Mean Everything

This past Friday morning, as I was driving home from visiting my dad in Charleston WV, I noticed a trackback I'd received to my blog. Glancing at the sender, my eyebrow raised high when I saw it was coming from **ProBlogger's** [Top 20 Bloggers to Watch in 2012](#) List.

Upon seeing this, immediately I asked my wife to read it out loud. Here is what the incredibly kind [Jade Craven](#), who authored the post, had to say:

I love his blog. He isn't a pseudo-guru testing his theories—he *only* teaches about stuff he's personally experienced. He also has a talent for community engagement. Many of his posts contribute to the conversation surrounding many facets of our industry, which encourages related companies to adjust their model to serve bloggers better.

Hands down, Marcus is one of the coolest guys online. He helps so many of us when he already has a successful business and doesn't need the social validation. I hope we'll see a lot more of him in the coming year.

Upon reading the final words, my wife looked at me with tears in her eyes and a huge smile. My 11-year old daughter Danielle told me I was, "Awesome." To say they were excited would be the understatement.

Yes, Recognition is Nice

You see, what most folks don't see when they read The Sales Lion is the emotional investment that has been made by the *entire* Sheridan Clan since its birth 2+ years ago.

Most don't know that when I started writing this blog my average sleep time per night went from around 8 hours to 5 or 6.

Most folks don't hear the conversations I have with my wife and kids on a daily basis regarding

this blog, the business, time spent away from home, etc.

Now don't get me wrong friends. I'm not mentioning these things so you'll in any way feel sorry for me (you shouldn't), as it's something I willingly signed up for and has been a major blessing. It's also a story that has been similarly repeated by any blogger or business owner around the world trying their best to find success.

But I mention this because without the "group effort" of my family, none of this is possible. There is a balance and order needed and all things, and we've worked very hard, together, to find said balance.

So when recognition comes from ProBlogger, or as it did with [Jonathan Fields](#) a few days later, there is certainly a sense of gratitude that comes with it.

We all like to be recognized for our talents and labors.

Every. Single. One. Of. Us.

Again, It's All About YOUR Goals

But to be completely honest, had I not been included on ProBlogger's or Jonathan's list, I never would have blinked.

Why?

Because the only thing I judge my ultimate success on comes from the **goals** I've already laid out for my future.

And being on ProBlogger's "Bloggers to Watch" list has never been, nor will it ever be, one of those goals.

The same could be said for any other "list" or "ranking" that's online today.

Honestly, they aren't on my validation radar whatsoever.

If they are a byproduct of my work, then great, but not for one second will I allow a list or ranking to define me.

Nor should you.

They Mean Nothing

I say this because as a result of being named to these lists I received an abnormally high number of emails that greatly concerned me.

Why?

Because they all asked a similar question:

“Marcus, what do you think I could do to get on a list like that?”

And with each email that came in, I literally cringed, and then responded with a simple question:

Why did you start blogging in the first place and was that one of your goals?

Think about it for a second- Why have so many in this industry gotten to this point of “list” and “ranking” validation? Is this how we judge all of our hard work and efforts? Aren’t there any other goals that define success and failure?

What do these lists really mean?

Yes, there is the recognition.

Yes, there is the chance for more traffic and links and such.

But at the same time, what do you think happens when a blogger, who has been on one of these lists, stops producing quality content?

What happens if they lose focus on their real goals (assuming they have them) and go after the

non-fulfilling ones of the world?

Or better yet, what happens if they just stop writing?

The answer, as you might imagine, is their blog/business suffers like the rest of us. They are immune to nothing. Look at any past ‘top blogger lists’ on the web and you’ll see many folks who today are no longer even active online.

Last Week Does NOT Define the Future

The Internet is a competitive place. Yeah, sure, last week was great for my blog.

But that was last week. It’s over. Done.

Now, if I don’t write good stuff, and don’t give real value, I’m toast.

Some will disagree with my thoughts here and call them too harsh, but I honestly feel that in many ways we’re only as good as our next post.

This is why I’m not one to look back and pat myself on the shoulder and then forget what got me here.

But this is also why it bothers me deeply when I read bloggers expressing their disappointment about not being included on lists or receiving the peer-recognition they feel they deserve.

As a young industry full of talented people, we must move past this.

Call me naïve if you wish, but I certainly think we can all do better.

Am I saying list posts and rankings are bad?

No, of course not. I’ve written my share of these types of posts in the past simply because I enjoy shedding light on great people who are blessing others through their work. This, in my opinion, is a very good thing and will never grow old.

But it's also time we all understood and defined **our true individual metrics of success**, as it's this vision that will carry us through the good and bad times that come with all the hard work, effort, and deep passion that is blogging.

10 Ways to Get Tons of Massive Comments on Your Blog Every Time

Lately, I've been receiving a number of emails with two repeating questions:

1. How do you get so many comments to your blog?
2. How do you get so many *quality* comments on you blog?

Good questions indeed. My last 8 articles have received an average of 75 comments each, a far cry from the days many, many months ago when I practically had to pay friends and family to read my posts and add a thought or two at the end. So the question is how does this shift happen? How do we go from 0 to 75 with every post? Here are my thoughts, and I can't wait to hear yours:

10 Ways to Get Tons of Massive Blog Comments Every Time

1. Stir Up the Pot: My friend and excellent blogger **Marlee Ward** from [Metamorphoself](#) said this the other day regarding my Tim Ferriss article. "*Marcus, Marcus, Marcus, I love how you gently stir the pot.....*" It made me laugh when she said it but it's true, great blog articles "stir the pot," thus causing people to think, question, and have a desire to respond with their own sentiments. And like Marlee said, you don't have to be over the top, a "gentle" stir is all that is needed to initiate some great conversation.

2. Don't See Comments as a One-Way Street: Many bloggers see comments as a simple exclamation point, confirming their article's greatness. This makes no sense to me at all. Personally, I don't think the "learning," in most cases, starts until the comment section. The comment section is the place where the community converges and a synergy of diverse thought mixes. If you want to see a great example of this, visit **Gini Dietrich's** killer blog at [Spin Sucks](#). She's a master at promoting conversation "after the fact" and it's obvious her community loves it.

3. Actively Comment Everywhere: As I've stated before, I simply didn't understand this early on in my blogging days. I was so wrapped up in "writing" that I was aloof of everything else. It wasn't until I started reading the thoughts of **Tristan Higbee** at Blogging Bookshelf that I finally started to "get it." You see, Tristan was one of the first bloggers to break down the science of commenting on other blogs so as to build awareness, branding, and comment reciprocity. He set commenting goals, did studies, and once even commented on [100 blog articles in a single day](#). Crazy? Yeah, but Tristan's blog took off like a rocket, and he was willing to pay the price to get there much quicker than most because of his extraordinary commenting efforts (plus he writes like a beast). He has obviously scaled back now, but the foundation has been built.

Personally, I spend about 5-6 hours a week reading and commenting on other blog posts. And although this may sound like a lot of time, it certainly is a guaranteed way to get people back to your blog so they then have the opportunity to share, and thus the snowball begins to grow.

4. Use CommentLuv and ReplyMe: Wow, what a difference these two plugins make. Although there are certain commenting platforms like Livefyre and Disqus, I much prefer your standard WordPress comment box with these two plugins. Why? 3 Reasons:

1. **CommentLuv** allows you to "share the love" with those who comment by showing their blog feed under the comment. I can't say how many times I've clicked on someone's CommentLuv feed simply because it showed a great blog title.

2. **ReplyMe** sends your individual reply to a commenter. With this plugin, the individual is guaranteed to know you appreciate them stopping by and allows you to further the discussion, especially if you integrate questions to that person in your reply.

3. **The standard WordPress** comment box is easy. It doesn't require too many hoops to jump through. This is the reason I don't like Livefyre and Disqus, as they make it tough for non-techies and beginners to leave comments. For example, if your grandmother (assuming she's not all that tech savvy) was reading your blog for the first time, could she leave a comment without help? If not, then you need to ask yourself if you're missing a good part of your audience.

Note**It goes without saying you should reply to every comment someone leaves on your site. Yes, it takes time, but it's worth it. Also, when you individually reply to every comment, it makes the total comment number greater, which acts as more of a social proof to first timers and others visiting your blog.

5. Let Your Articles Simmer: I used to write 3-4 articles a week. Now I post every 3 days. This pattern allows comments, and conversation, to build up much more over that time period. To

give you a better feel for this, if an article gets 75 comments, 35 are usually the first day, 25 the second, and 15 the third.

6. Be a Thought Leader: Yep, we can do everything in the world in terms of great networking, but you've got to be a thought leader in your niche. You must tackle issues others are not. You must stretch your mind and see the world "*just a little differently*" than everyone else. This is what thought-leaders do and this is why they're great. Want to see some powerful examples? Just visit [Danny Brown's](#) stellar blog or **Mitch Joel's** incredibly innovative [Six Pixels of Separation](#) to see two guys that are "crush'n it" in this area of thought leadership.

7. Be Very Opinionated: If you're really looking to make the sparks fly and hear what others are thinking, learn to be the guy or girl that isn't afraid to have a strong opinion regarding topics in your niche. Remember, people want black and white, not gray, so take a stand. A perfect example of this was **Brankica Underwood** with her gutsy article "[MarketMeSuite Sucks: The Worst Product I've Ever Tried](#)," which got a meager 110 comments and initiated quite the lively conversation. Sadly, many bloggers simply don't have Brankica's chutzpah, but if they did, they'd surely see many, many more comments.

8. Look to Give Value to Others at Every turn: Are you regularly tweeting other people's stuff? And when you tweet, is it generic or does it actually say something cool and thoughtful about the article? Do you mention others in your blog posts? Do you praise your peers more than you praise yourself? If you're not doing these things, you're missing the boat. [John Falchetto](#) does this as well as anyone I've seen online. Honestly, I'm amazed at how much time he spends promoting other people's stuff, but that's also why his blog is skyrocketing and he's getting more and more comments with every new post.

9. Use GREAT Headlines: It's sad to me just how often I see great blog articles fade off in the sunset because their titles stink. To give you an example, my last article, which was entitled "**The Curse of Tim Ferriss, Why Living Abroad Ain't Always the Answer**" was extremely catchy (100+comments and counting), and within one hour of posting it had been read a few hundred times. Why? Because Internet folks like you and I get countless articles in our feed or inbox each and every day. We must stand out. If not, then it's likely the article will get shifted to the bottom of the pile. So the next time you write a blog article ask yourself if the title is catchy, appealing, or thought-promoting. If it's not, come up with a new one.

10. Ask and Ye Shall Receive: Have you ever asked readers to comment? If not, what the heck is wrong with you? Do you realize many newer bloggers and readers don't know whether you care if they comment or not? As for me, I care. This is why at the end of almost all of my articles I'll ask one or two questions to readers and then say something really silly, like "Remember, comment checks will be sent in the mail every 3rd Friday of the month." Obviously, everyone knows I'm just being goofy, but it's enough to make a reader smile and say, "Heck, why not?"

10,862 Comments Later, I Realize Blog Comments are NOT a Business Model

I had a very interesting conversation with my close friend and blogger [John Falchetto](#) last week that centered around blog comments. In our discussion, John posed to me a very simple question:

“Marcus, of all the comments on your blog, how many of the people turned out to be actual customers?”

“Hmmm,” I thought “I really don’t think anyone that has commented on TSL has *ever* turned into a paying customer. Some customers have turned into commenters *after* being a client, but not the other way around.”

“Exactly,” said John, “Me neither.”

Think about that for a second: **Over 10,000 comments and not a single customer.**

A Clear Understanding of Goals

You see, what started this conversation with John was my inquiry into his blogging schedule, and the fact that he is now writing a post just about every day, more than double his previous posting schedule. In a nutshell, here are the results:

1. Less comments per post (about half of what he used to get, sometimes less)
2. More traffic
3. More paying clients

In fact, John came right out and said what I’ve been feeling for the past few months:

“I really don’t care about the number of comments on my posts anymore. I’m trying to reach my goals. That’s my focus. And comments don’t fall under my goals. If they come, then great, if not, that’s OK.”

Powerful stuff, wouldn't you agree?

Living and Dying By the Comments of Others

When I first started writing here on TSL in November of 2009, **I lived and died by comments.** I almost passed out with the first one I ever got. Then, the first time I got 10 on a post I almost cried. Next, when I reached 50 comments for the first time I thought my life was complete. When I passed 100 comments on a post the first time I felt a sense of joy that was unbelievable. And finally, when I passed 400 comments on a post, I thought I had died and gone to blogger's heaven. (I know, sounds pretty shallow, but that's where I was at the time, and I think many other people, if they're being honest with themselves, would relate.)

But then something happened. Time went by. The weeks rolled on. The comments just kept on mounting with each and every post.

And oddly, as the comments grew, my sense of joy that came with each declined.

Blogging "Maturity"

Now don't get me wrong here friends. This isn't one of those, "Please stop commenting on my blog" posts. To this day, **I invite comments on every post. I appreciate every one I get from readers. I take them seriously and know the relationships formed through them can clearly lead to tremendous opportunities. I also find them inspiring, enjoyable, and well worth the hours and hours I have spent in responding to each.**

But I've also reached a point in my "blogging maturity" (I guess that's what we'll call it) where I don't feel **validated** anymore purely based on comment numbers. In fact, this is now how I judge the success of a blog post:

1. How many **personal emails** do I get after someone has read the article?
2. What were others moved to do (actions taken) from reading the article?
3. How many **speaking/consulting inquiries** do I get from an article?

Do you see the difference?

Take last [Thursday's post](#) for example. It wasn't about "blogging," or even so much about business, but more about "personal development," a topic I love but don't discuss a ton here on TSL.

Looking at that article, you'll see that it only got around 60 or so comments, a low number based on TSL averages. But at the same time, within 30 minutes after that post had went out to email subscribers, I'd received **5 personal emails** from readers saying how much they appreciated the post. And of these 5 people, all rarely if ever comment on the blog here.

In other words, that post induced enough emotion for the "lurkers" (those that don't typically comment on a blog but actually make up about 95% or more of the audience) to **take action** and send an email. For me, that defines success in a major way, because I want my writings to induce not just thought, but **action**.

Is Your Need for Comments Hindering Your Business Growth?

I wonder how many folks out there are actually hurting their bottom line because they are too focused on blog comments and not focused enough on effective business principles. Or look at it in this way: Are you writing for the 1% that leave comments or the 99% that are silent in the background?

For example, it would have been easy for John Falchetto, if he were so wrapped up in number of comments per post, to shy away from increasing frequency, as he knew comment averages would obviously go down.

But because he now has a clearer vision of what we wants, and the best way to get there, he was able to not allow such a questionable metric to affect him.

I've heard many "A-list" bloggers state a similar point: Posting every day, although it may not lead to more comments, leads to more subscribers, profits, etc.

Am I saying with this that you should post every day?

No, of course not. Personally, I can't imagine myself posting every day, it honestly, at least at this point, doesn't interest me at all.

Looking Elsewhere for Validation

But what I am saying is that our need for “comment validation” and our search for “big numbers” should never get in the way of our ability to meet the other goals we’ve set as bloggers.

For some of you, those goals may be many, with financial gain being a center component.

For others, commenting and discussion may be your only goals. **That’s great too.**

But know thy self. Know thy goals.

And then do whatever it takes to make those goals and dreams a reality.

7 Signs Other than Traffic that TRULY Indicate a Blog Article’s Success

Have you ever written a blog post and within a few minutes or hours of publishing you just knew it was something special? In the beginning days of TSL, back when it was me and the crickets, I used to write blog posts with such a high anticipation as to “what might be.” But, inevitably, because my site got the traffic of a back road in the desert, nothing ever seemed to amount to anything.

But times have drastically changed. Somehow, as I stumbled from one post to the next, the audience grew. And with this growth, I’ve now had the opportunity to analyze the true characteristics of a successful blog article versus one that’s, well, *not* so successful.

Success Equals Action

When it comes down to it folks, great writing leads to action. And as the saying goes, “Actions speak louder than words.” This statement could not be in truer when it comes to the blogosphere. You see, I don’t really judge an article’s success based on the number of tweets, comments, or even views it gets. Yeah, sure that can be somewhat of a sign but have you really done anything if 100 people leave you 100 different versions of “nice job” in your comment section?

For example, about a year ago, I wrote a guest post on “[The Change Blog](#).” Since it was published, that little post has gotten a meager **230,000 views** on Stumble Upon and has also been “liked” over **1,000 times** on Facebook. Sounds pretty cool, right? Well, yes and no. Although it has produced hundreds of visitors to TSL, I’m not aware of any clients that I’ve gained from it or even loyal readers.

Now don’t get me wrong here, high numbers are all fine and dandy, especially in the beginning, but depth and breadth of **action** are what carry the day as a blogger experiences more success and a richer understanding of online fulfillment.

7 Signs Other than Traffic that Truly Indicate a Blog Article’s Success

I want to discuss the essential factors that *truly* measure the success of a blog article, and I’m excited to get your thoughts as well.

1. Lurkers Come Out- The quickest way I can tell that I’ve just written a great article is when the “lurkers” come out. And who are the “lurkers”? **John Falchetto** wrote a [great article](#) about this but in most cases, they are roughly 90% or more of a blog’s readership. This majority comes by to learn, not “interact” (thru commenting, tweeting, etc). They are often loyal, but they do it in silence. And it is this silent majority that in many ways is the essence of a blogger’s success.

This is why one of the best indicators for me of a successful post is when I see a number of commenters *without* avatars in the comment section. In other words, if someone leaves a comment on my blog who doesn’t have an avatar, I know they are likely not a “blogger” per se, but rather a business owner, a company employee learning about marketing, etc. It’s these people that often turn into my actual clients and are a great indicator as to a blogger’s ability to engage his or her community on a higher level.

2. DM’s on Twitter- Although regular tweets are nice, direct messages on Twitter from readers give me way more satisfaction, as I know the sender has no other intention than a true 1 on 1 interaction. An example of this came with my now semi-infamous article about the “[Biggest Blogging Jerk Ever](#),” when at least 5 or 6 people that day alone direct messaged me to ask questions about “Blogger X.”

3. Personal Emails- Very similar to DMs on Twitter, when personal emails come rolling in after a post you know you’ve done something great. The best example of this I’ve ever experienced was when I asked my entire community on TSL to help me come up with my tagline (Thanks again [Mark Harai](#)!). From this post alone, I received double-digit emails, most of which came

from my wonderful “lurkers,” suggesting various tagline ideas.

Also, from a business standpoint, I can tell an article was effective when an unusually high amount of potential clients fill out a contact form expressing an interest in one of my services immediately after posting a service-related article.

4. Comment Length- My friend [Adam Toporek](#) left an awesome comment on TSL yesterday that really got me thinking about this. Here’s what he said in regards to my article “[Massive Blog Growth: Do You Have the Time It Takes?](#)”

.....I’ve been out of the loop for a few days with offline life, and I was going to drop by a few of my favorite blogs this evening and do some commenting. I got stuck on this post for over 30 minutes. It was a great conversation, and I was reading all of the comments. When I finally got to the end, I noticed how small the scroll bar was on the browser. That’s when I realized – wow, this is a lot of text!

So, I did an experiment and copied the text on this page into Word; it is around 18,000 words with the comments. Yes, Marcus, that’s 1/5 of a good-sized modern novel for a single blog post!

Upon contemplating Adam’s words, I realized that even though that particular article may not have had the most comments of any article I’ve ever written, it had far and away the best conversation and most words of any previous comment section. In fact, a few people, like [Tisha](#), [Elena](#), [Davina](#), [Diana](#), [Ayo](#), [Tony](#), [Shonali](#), [Alex](#), [Paul](#), [Stu](#), [Erica](#), [John](#), [JK](#), and [Bill](#) all contributed comments over 300 words each! And some, like Shonali’s and Tisha’s, were *much* longer.

My point is that between my thoughts and your incredible comments, we ended up with **over 18,500 words!!!** Considering Seth Godin has written books that long (or short, depending on how you look at it) I think we did pretty darn well my friends!! How ‘bout them apples??!

5. The 2nd Day Phenomena- An easy way to know if a blog article is going to do very well is by the performance it has during the second day. Similar to the way Hollywood judges a movie by how well it does its 2nd weekend, if a blog article gets more views the second day than the first, it’s probably going to be a hit. For example, my “Blogging Jerk” article received around 700 views its first day and then 1200 the second. As soon as I saw this, I knew it was going to do very, very well.

6. Continued Comments-As most of you know, I usually post every 3 days. There are many reasons why I do this, but one is because most of the time, the conversation and comments pretty

much die out by day three. But there are certain cases when an article's comments will continue to grow for many weeks. For example, the article I did about *"15 Bloggers that are Changing the Blogosphere as We Know It"* got at least one comment a day for the first 2 weeks after it was published.

7. Guest Post Solicitations-The final sign that your blog post is a huge success comes from the kind solicitations of other bloggers asking you for a guest post on their blog. To me, this is a wonderful form a flattery, as it really shows the person respects your work and trusts you enough to invite you over for dinner at their place (blog). For example, last week I got 6 separate guest post invitations from some of my amazing friends and acquaintances in the blogosphere. (Sorry [Chris Brogan](#), but I'm still going to have to turn you down for now.) Needless to say, these kind petitions were very, very humbling and appreciated.

The Indescribable Commitment and Marriage that is Blogging

On Monday of this week I married a beautiful young couple. Yes, you did read that correctly. I was the guy officiating, giving the "sermon," and all that jazz. Although I mention religion very rarely here on TSL, this duty comes with my position at my church, and to be honest, I find it to be one of the more sobering and reflective things I've ever done.

After the beautiful ceremony was over, and the two (Brittany and Charlie) rode off on their honeymoon, I thought about the years they will now have together, and the commitment that comes with such an important act in their lives.

The Commitment that is Blogging

Speaking of commitment, being a husband, father of 4, entrepreneur, blogger, and active participant in my church has lead me to think about this subject quite a bit over the years. There is a high level of pressure with each, and just as Brittany and Charlie likely can't currently grasp just how much of a commitment is required for the step they've now taken, many new bloggers and content marketers have little concept of what it takes to make their 'marriage' a lasting one.

To give you an example, as I write this article, the time is 10:30pm and I find myself sitting in a hotel room, alone and a little spent. I've been on the road for about 7 hours today and to be quite honest, like most folks would do in this moment, it would be nice just to grab the TV remote, lay down in the bed, and slowly drift away into the night.

But not on this night. Fatigue and mental weariness are no excuse. I have a post due in the morning, and now is the time to do it. Such is the life of a serious blogger, and such is the life that I embrace.

Why Most Blogs are Failing

Am I special for doing this? No, not really, as there are thousands out there just like me. But to be completely frank, most blogs fail because of a lack of commitment on the part of the writer, plain and simple. It's not about talent, ability, or great ideas. It's about commitment, and they ain't got it. **Corporations** stop blogging because it's too hard to get every article approved by some ridiculous VP in a corner office. **Small businesses** stop blogging because they're too busy with the minutia of everyday "stuff" that they forget great marketing is the only thing that will keep their business moving forward. **Individuals** stop blogging because they too easily get distracted, worn down, or frustrated with their lack of immediate success.

Thus, like everything else of great value in this world, many are called but few are chosen.

It's a crying shame really. You see, I view what we all do as way more than blogging. In fact, I hate the dumb word—"Blogging." I mean could it possibly be any less complimentary to the act itself?? At its core, **bloggers are teachers**. That's what we do. Whether I'm teaching someone about swimming pools or marketing principles, it's all the same, and I'm making a positive difference in someone's life.

The "Why"

We've heard many times that companies often fail to motivate their employees because although they understand "the what," they clearly don't get "the why" For example, some employees with my swimming pool company see themselves as pool builders. Others see themselves as someone who helps bring families closer together by creating backyard memories. See the difference?

This concept is exactly what motivates me late at night when 99% of others in my position would be falling asleep to the TV. I'm not a blogger. No sir. **I'm a provider**. I feed employees and their families all over the world. My words make it possible for someone who is on the brink of losing his or her business to change what they've been doing and turn everything around—leading to a life of financial peace and temporal well-being. In fact, I could go on and on about the difference this blog (**and your blog too**) can make in someone's life.

Some folks may read this and think it sounds conceited. That's fine, because I don't really care

what others think. If I did, I might just see this as “just another marketing blog.” But how inspiring would that be?

The Reward

Like you, I live for the moment when someone says, “*Marcus, thank you so much for writing this, I finally understand it*” or “*Marcus, I’ve been on your website for the last 4 hours. I’m blown away. This is going to change everything for me.*”

Again, I’m not making these statements to brag. If someone writes to truly help people, no matter the subject or field, over time messages like these will be common occurrences.

And that, my friends, is what moves us to heights we never imagined possible. That is what enables us to type away late into the night when it would be so easy just to close the computer and go to bed. And that is the core of a commitment to blogging.

So that’s my challenge to you on this day. Forget about the “what” and start focusing on “the why.” Make that your business and blogging mantra. Commit to sticking with this no matter how long it takes or what obstacles come your way. Embrace the concept that you are a teacher, a helper, and a giver. By so doing, I can assure you this “marriage” will be a lasting and joyous one.

Eventually, Mr. Blogger, You Actually Have to Do Something

Have you ever, in the midst of reading a blog post, thought to yourself that the blog was destined to fail? Chances are you have. In fact, I’d be willing to bet you’ve had this feeling more than once.

Personally, I get it all the time. After two years in the blogosphere, at this point I usually have a general feel if a blogger is going to last 6 months or not, simply by reading one post.

Does that make me special? No, of course not. Like I said, you do/feel it too. When you “read between the lines” of content, it’s amazing just how much you can predict about a blog’s future. Now granted, I love it when my gut is wrong, because I get no joy out of watching another’s dreams go down the drain, but what I’m saying here is a reality for all of us.

The Truth Hurts

I had a very interesting experience last week when a fellow friend and blogger, **Steve Roy** of [Ending the Grind](#), called me one night, very distraught, and explained how he had just gotten his teeth kicked in (figuratively speaking) by ultra popular blogger/writer Penelope Trunk as he was interviewing her for his weekly podcast.

Steve then asked me to listen to the recording so as to hear my thoughts on the matter.

To make a long story short, Penelope turned the interview on Steve, and proceeded to tell him why his blog was failing, why he wasn't reaching his "goals," and why things wouldn't change until he completely changed his outlook and started **doing things** differently.

To be frank, it was one of the most uncanny displays of psychology I've ever seen in my life. Quickly I learned that Penelope has a communication gift—it's called cutting through the bull and saying things exactly like they are.

Although I hope like heck you take a moment to personally listen to [the podcast](#) and hear the moving conversation, Penelope's main point to Steve was simple:

Stop pretending like you're doing stuff when you're not.

Wow, strong words, but very, very insightful.

Yeah, sure Steve has written tons of articles, built a solid community, and interviewed many great folks in the blogosphere. Notwithstanding these things, he has made no real progress towards leaving his normal job. Hence Penelope's words that he has done nothing.

The Law of Momentum in Blogging

Steve's case is just one example of how the **Law of Momentum** affects each and every one of us. Fact is, when it comes to our goals and dreams, we're either making progress or we're going backwards, there is no static ground.

Let me put it to you another way:

Question: What happens to a tree when it stops growing?

Answer: It dies.

See what I'm saying here. Progress, and actually "doing something," are the life line of a blogger and his or her content. **The Goal of "Building Community" Isn't Enough**

This is also why "building a blogging community" is **not** a viable long term goal for a blogger. Yeah, sure a community is awesome, but there comes a point in every blogger's life when "having a strong community" simply isn't enough.

Some of you may take my words on community as sacrilegious, which is fine. But mark my words, if you think just having a strong community is going to be enough impetus to keep you blogging for the next 10 years, you're sorely mistaken.

There must be more.

There must be growth.

There must be action.

There must be creation.

Seeking the Remarkable

Let me give you another perfect example of what I'm talking about.

Last week I was speaking with the ultra talented **Farnoosh Brock** of [Prolific Living](#). As we were emailing back and forth, I asked Farnoosh if she would be attending [Blog World LA](#) in November, at which point she replied:

"Alas, no BlogWorld for me and it's not for lack of wanting to hang out with my dear friends and community, and now that I know I will be missing your speech on top of everything else, I feel a bit sad. To be honest, I decided after WDS, Marcus, that I need to have something to show for and I have to stay put and really **work up something remarkable.**"

Frankly, I was very, very impressed with these words from Farnoosh. You see, she could easily go to BlogWorld, have a great experience, meet lots of new folks, etc., but that simply wouldn't satisfy where she is at this point with her blog.

Farnoosh is now in the stage of **creation**. She knows she has to push herself to greater heights or she'll be just like the tree that stops growing.

To Farnoosh, I say "Well Done."

Others Doing It Right

I could go on and on with other examples of folks that are busy creating, doing, and growing. **Stuart** is taking [Unlock theDoor](#) to another level.

John Falchetto has become way more than an "expat coach." His [30day challenge](#) is making waves and literally changing the lives of those that are participating.

Gini Dietrich is launching [Spin Sucks Pro](#). (Oh, and she's writing a book too)

[JK Allen](#) is..... (oh wait, I can't tell you yet, but it's going to be awesome!!) (Sorry JK, couldn't resist bud)

All of these folks are examples of "successful" bloggers that are moving on to their **next level of growth**, and I can guarantee that each would tell you that if they didn't make these moves, they'd be going backwards.

My Growth Vision

As for me, most of you already know I'm in the midst of major changes in my life. I used to write about inbound and content marketing from the perspective of a pool guy. That worked for awhile, but now it's simply not enough. **There must be growth.**

In the coming years, this blog will be full of my consulting stories, just like the one in [Michigan](#), where inbound and content marketing impacted a company and changed lives.

Also, as of today, I have 8 contracted speaking events in 8 different states scheduled for 2012. Once I get to about 20, that will be enough. Within the next 2 years, I'll be speaking all over the world. And as I do this, you're going to hear all about it.

To put it simply, **I'm going to keep telling you what life teaches me.**

But all of this is a result of my search constant yearning for growth, creation, and improvement.

Something Greater

So that's my challenge to you today my friends. Are you actually "doing something," or are you just writing the same stuff you did last week, with a slightly different tune?

It is my hope that you're stretching yourself—that you're looking for opportunities to grow, create, and push your talents.

If you want to continue in this thing called *blogging*, I can assure you this is the only way and means whereby you'll accomplish such a difficult yet rewarding task.

5 Essential Qualities of Growing Your Blog in a Crowded Niche

We all want our blogs to grow. I do, you do, we all do. But as many are now finding, it's getting more and more difficult to experience growth quickly, especially in industries that are more saturated with many great bloggers and tons of excellent content.

Notwithstanding, every year bloggers come from nowhere and explode onto the scene, finding a way to build a large audience quickly and become a leading voice of authority and trust within their field.

So how does it happen? How can a newbie blogger increase their ascension to the top of their chosen industry? This article will demonstrate qualities of successful bloggers and how they have found a way to stand out from their peers in a very short period of time.

1. Be Relentless in Getting Stuff Done

I put this one first because often times when we read about “shortcuts to success,” we forget the most important principle of all—**hard work**. And when I look at bloggers that have shown a propensity to push with an unrelenting enthusiasm to get things done, one name really stands out to me—**Danny Iny**.

For those of you unfamiliar with Danny, he started his blog [Firepole Marketing](#) at the beginning of 2011 and managed to not only build a name for himself, but also produce one of the Year’s best works (IMO) with his excellent book, **Engagement From Scratch**, a must read for any blogger.

What was so impressive about Danny was the sheer amount of “stuff” he did during the year to get going. Not only did he produce 2-3 great articles each week on his own blog, but he also managed to land more guest posts in one year than anyone I’ve ever seen....by a landslide. Moreover, Danny also commenced a marketing training program, published his book, and found the time to get married in the process.

Seriously, I thought I was pretty motivated until I saw everything Danny was able to accomplish in 2011, but he certainly opened my eyes to the possibilities if we put in the time and truly “will” success into our lives.

2. Think Wayyyyy Outside the [Opt-in] Box

Whenever there is content saturation in an industry, one major key to standing out is the ability to think completely outside the box and offer fresh perspective on principles most folks have never considered. One person that comes to mind immediately when I consider this is **Derek Halpern** of [Social Triggers](#). Derek was the first person (that I’m aware of) that put an opt-in box on his home page, something that many bloggers big and small have done since learning about this feature. (I added it recently myself and it works extremely well.)

Although Derek doesn’t write a prolific amount of content, the stuff he does write is always extremely thoughtful and often times questions status-quo best practices, a quality that has helped him build an email list of over 10,000 names in less than one year.

3. Know Your Shtick and Go After It Aggressively

I’ve talked about “[knowing your shtick](#)” quite a bit on my blog but the phrase refers to one’s ability to know their core strengths and passions, and then actively pursue this direction without distraction.

A perfect example of this is [Amy Porterfield](#), who, in less than one year, has become known as

one of the premier experts on using Facebook for marketing and business. Instead of trying to be all things to all people, Amy has focused her efforts in one area, and boy have the dividends paid off. In fact, Amy recently launched arguably the most thorough online training course for Facebook marketing ever produced— **FBInfluence**.

4. Learn to Post Powerful and Effective Blog Titles

I honestly feel one of the biggest problems in the blogosphere, especially for newer bloggers, is that they simply don't understand how to write blog post titles that arouse reader interest and lead to a high click-through rate. Although this may sound self-aggrandizing, I'm going to list a few examples from my marketing blog to show you exactly what I'm talking about:

Chris Brogan Unfollowed Me on Twitter and Now I Hate My Life

Eventually, Mr. Blogger, You Actually Have to Do Something

10,862 Comments Later, I Realize Blog Comments Are NOT a Business Model

7 Reasons Why Having a Twitter Feed in Your Sidebar is a Really Dumb Idea

5. Think Like a Teacher

If you're a great teacher, and you find a way to speak to your audience in a way they can understand, it's a good chance you'll find success as a blogger.

A perfect example of this is **Pat Flynn** from [SmartPassive Income](#). Anyone that has ever read Pat's blog will always describe it with this word—**helpful**. In fact, it's not just helpful, it's *extremely* helpful. Pat has a magical way of putting himself in the shoes of an inexperienced or beginning blogger, and then showing techniques, practices, etc. in such a way that anyone can understand. If you read Pat's blog, there is a good chance you'll leave every post with something new and applicable you can apply to your blog and business—the truest sign of a great teacher.

How Long Does It Truly Take For A Business Blog To Grow Big?

Over the past year I've talked to hundreds of business owners and bloggers about success in this field, and inevitably everyone asks the exact same derivative of this question within the first 10 minutes of conversation:

“OK, assuming we do all of this stuff, how long with it take for our blog to grow, produce results, and make sales?”

Ahhh yes, a dang good question indeed.

Despite what any “[SEO hack](#)” might tell you, the only answer to this question is, “It all depends.”

And possibly more than anything, it depends on a very important indicator that I like to call “CSI,” or otherwise stated, and industry’s **Content Saturation Index**.

To make CSI easy to understand, it works like this—**The more content an industry/niche has written about it, the harder it is for a blog to make headway and find success in that field.**

And when an industry has very little online content available to the masses, it can often be gobbled up within almost no time at all.

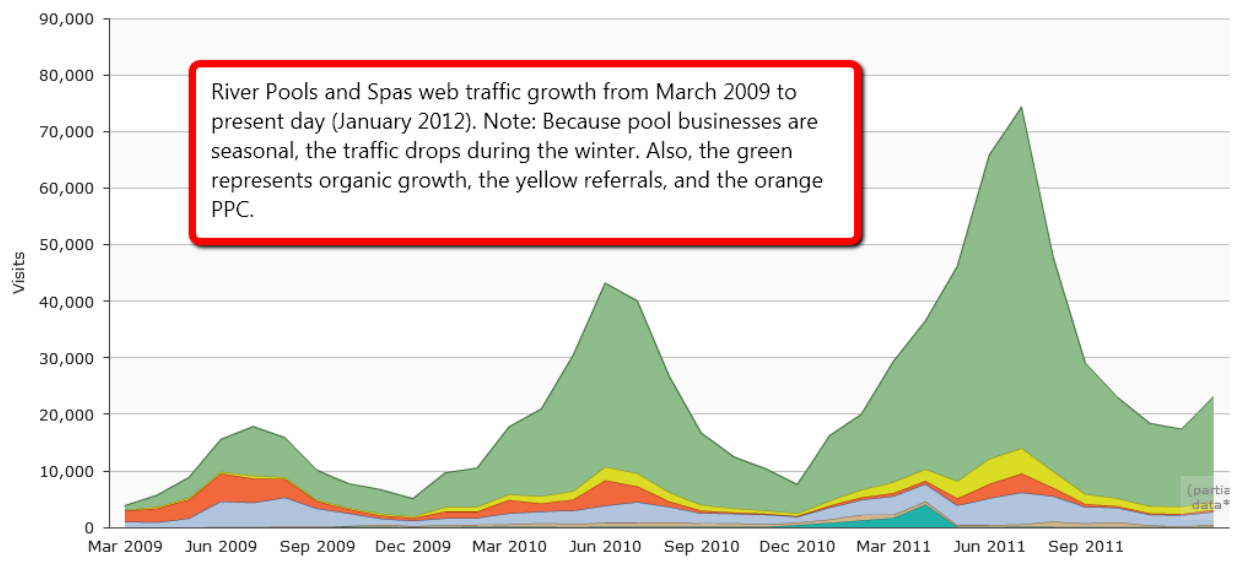
Let me give you an example of both extremes.

River Pools and Spas: Skyrocketing to Success Through Content

In March of 2009, I started blogging for my [swimming pool company](#). At the time, less than 20% of our website traffic was “organic” (free through search). The rest came from PPC (Pay Per Click) and “direct.” Within 6 months, and after blogging 2-3 times a week, there was a significant shift in our numbers and the organic traffic started to grow dramatically. It was also during this time we started to experience more leads and sales because of this new found traffic.

Within 18 months, the blog had elevated the website to an elite status in the swimming pool industry. By now, the [long-tail keyword campaigns](#) were paying huge dividends. Within hours of writing an article with specific keyword goals, we were showing up on the first page of Google. This success also enabled us to cut all of our old-school advertising and go 100% “all-in” with blogging/content marketing.

But keep in mind, all of this would not have been possible had the CSI of the swimming pool industry not been so low. In other words, because so many “pool guys” had zero interest in producing great content on their websites to teach the masses, it left a field wide open for someone like me to come in and have a complete harvest. (Note** I still had to be strategic and smart in terms of topics, SEO, etc.)



And believe it or not, to this day there are many, many industries (especially blue-collar fields) that greatly lack content on the web, and are just waiting for someone (like YOU) to come along and take the bull by the horns and quickly rise to the top.

The Sales Lion: A Slow Rise to Success

On the reverse side of the coin, let's take a look at **The Sales Lion**.

In a field focused on blogging, marketing, and business tips, you can imagine just how much content is currently out there. The amount of folks writing about this stuff is growing by the day, which is one reason why so many bloggers and businesses struggle to stand out in the fields of marketing, self-improvement, sales, etc.

I started The Sales Lion in November of 2009. At the time, I naturally figured I'd just walk right in, just as I'd done in the swimming pool industry, and dominate.

Boy was I wrong.

For the first year, this blog grew *very* little. In fact, it really wasn't until I woke up and started working much harder on my [networking](#) that things finally picked up around the beginning of 2011. Luckily for me, I wasn't dependent on The Sales Lion to pay my bills during this time period, otherwise I would have gone broke.

But by midway 2011, two very important things started happening:

1. Companies started contacting me for inbound/content marketing help.
2. Conferences started contacting me to speak at their events.

Finally, **after almost 20 months of diligently blogging 2-3 times per week**, the Law of Momentum had started to work its magic. The relationships built were paying off. Organic search was actually growing. And a business was starting to form and take shape.



But explaining why things took so much longer to happen for The Sales Lion is again because of the content saturation index being so very, very high in this industry.

And whenever this occurs, solid content is usually not enough to get a blog going. In fact, as I've stated on other occasions, beyond networking I'd strongly suggest bloggers embrace these two core skill-sets:

1. Learning [how to write articles for SEO](#), especially when it comes to proper blog titles.
2. Learn to be a [blogging rebel](#) in your industry. Talk about stuff no one else is willing to talk about.

No matter what an industry's CSI is, if these two needs are not met as well, a blog will likely experience little success.

Yes, But How Long Will it Take??

Before I close this little post, I know some of you still are wondering what the average amount of time is needed for a business blog to show an increase in web traffic, leads, and sales. And although there are countless factors that go into this question, I would say the average for most companies, who intelligently blog at least 2-3 times per week, **is 6-12 months**.

Again, that's an average, but it seems to be the most common number after tracking the success of my clients and other companies over the past 2 years.

Despite this average though, short term results are absolutely possible as well. For example, you could write a blog post today (your first one even) that ranks well for a particular keyword phrase tomorrow, which then leads to a web visitor that same day, who then fills out a form on your website, who then becomes a customer a few days later.

Not only have I seen this scenario many times with both my companies, but every business I've worked with that has **truly** embraced a culture of consistent content marketing has experienced the same as well.

The Bottom Line

All this being said, really the most important aspect to the question of “How long will it take?” comes down to actually [getting started and doing something](#). Unless you start producing content and pushing it out there to the masses, you'll never know about time, be it short or long term.

But this much is for certain—**You need to start**. And if you do, *and do it well*, the rest will fall into place.

Why “Community” is NOT the Holy Grail of Blogging and Online Success

Many of you read an article I wrote entitled [10,862 Comments Later, I Realize Blog Comments Are NOT a Business Model](#). At the time, the article certainly got a lot of comments and interaction.

Some understood it.

Others completely missed the mark.

But today's post is a harder and deeper look at a subject that affects each and every one of us—the **misunderstood concept that is “Online Community.”**

Yep, Let's Talk Money

As you can tell from the title of this post, today we're going to talk about money.

The reason for this is simple: **Businesses don't exist without money.**

I think this statement is one of the most forgotten truths when discussing the subject of online business success.

Again, nothing happens in business without money.

If your business makes enough of it, you smile and turn a profit.

If your business doesn't have enough to pay your bills, and the creditors are after you, and you can't make payroll.....well then **life stinks**.

I should know--- [been there, done that](#).

Blogger's Denial

Let me give you an example and then to my point.

A few months ago , while I was attending BlogWorld and grabbing a bite to eat, I happened to see a lady sitting alone at a small table and being that I was looking to meet someone new, plus the fact that all the tables were taken, I asked her if I could join her and she happily obliged.

We proceeded to have a very pleasant conversation about her blog, her large community, the high level of engagement, etc.

Upon hearing all this, I told her that I thought community was great, but blog comments, in and of themselves, were not a business model nor a strong success indicator.

The lady disagreed with me but as we continued our discussion, it came out that her blog was

clearly not making enough money .

In other words, she couldn't pay her bills and was very, very concerned.

Although her blog *appeared* successful, there was a reality check happening beyond what was showing in “the community.”

In many ways, this very kind lady was wrapped up in a belief that is killing the success of many, many bloggers and businesses today—**that “community” means “profits.”**

Nope.

Not even close.

Make the Choice

Now for those of you who legitimately don't care for one second if your blog ever makes a dime, please understand this doesn't apply to you.

But for the large majority that are doing their best through blogging, [content marketing](#), and [inbound marketing](#) to make a living, I'd ask you to consider this question:

Would you rather have a thriving online community or a thriving bank account?

And no, you're not allowed to say “both.”

Yes, of course the ideal answer is “both,” but in this case, let's just pretend you've got to make a choice.

What's the answer going to be?

I submit that too many bloggers are worried more about “offending” their community than actually leveraging said community to turn a profit.

Again, we can love our communities to death and have the greatest intentions in the world, but if we can't pay the bills, it's all for naught.

Focusing on What Matters

Someone recently told me they didn't like my opt-in box on the homepage of my site because it was too "pushy," and that others in the community probably didn't like it either. But considering the incredible amount of eBook downloads that form generates every day, plus the fact so many of those same readers turn into actual consulting and HubSpot customers of mine, **I really don't care if a few people are offended with the box.**

Again, it's about priorities, and paying customers are #1. Because you can't always please every reader you have with every decision you make, sometimes you've simply got to choose the one that leads to the greater good.

You see, I don't think many folks online would ever make such statements, as "community" is viewed by most as the "Holy Grail" of the blogosphere.

And although community is very, very important, it is *not* the Holy Grail.

What is? Happy Customers + Profits = Business success

Now *that* is the Holy Grail.

And if it happens by way of an amazing blogging community, then great....wonderful. In fact, when a blog/business finds a way to better monetize their community and give great value in the process, then believe it or not the community itself grows stronger. (As noted by the 100+ emails I got last week alone from people that read my newsletter yet don't actively comment on my blog.)

But if a blogger or business owner loses track of this extreme priority, then we have a serious problem.

This Ain't the Field of Dreams

Blogging for business is not like the movie "Field of Dreams." Sure, "*If you build it, they will*

come” is a start, but there needs to be a few more words attached to the end of this statement to make it applicable to our industry: “**And once they come, know how to make enough of them happy and paying customers.**”

So before your business starts focusing too much on the number of [Facebook likes](#), tweets, silly [Alexa rankings](#), massive amounts of [blog comments](#), or even frivolous Klout scores.....please remember the one thing that we all must have first and foremost on our minds—**Financial Peace**.

Chapter 4: The Power of Video

6 Ways to Create Powerful “Feel Good” YouTube Videos for Your Small Business

There is nothing like the impact a simple video can have on a business. Recently I posted a video on my swimming pool blog that did very well and got quite a response. Why? Well despite the fact that it discussed the boring topic of “*How to Vacuum an Inground Swimming Pool*,” it included one rather unique feature:

My 6-year-old son was the one who did the demo and the teaching.

Think about this for a second: How many videos are there on the Internet right now that show how to vacuum an inground swimming pool? Answer—a whole bunch.

How many of these same videos use a 6-year-old as the teacher?? Answer—None.

Hopefully you see what I’m saying here. In fact, I want to take a brief look today at 6 steps we can take to make our company and business videos more “feel good,” therefore building better and stronger relationships with our viewers and consumer base.

1. Involve family when possible: No surprise to this one if you watched the video of my son. I always try to involve my wife and children in my company videos because it feels much more personable, friendly, and warm to our potential clients. In fact, many customers I meet for the first time will mention to me how they watched a video I made with my children in them and just how much they enjoyed seeing them.

2. Use Humor: Too often businesses take themselves way too seriously, which in turn causes their videos to be quite boring and unemotional. Laughing and using humor shows our “human” side to our potential clients. Videos are always better if the person watching them has a grin.

3. Pop Up/Downs are Great: Do you remember how Pop-Up Videos were the rage for VH1 in the 1990s? Since that time, pop-ups have been integrated into all parts of media, and great YouTube video should be no different. Not only are pop ups quite informative, but they also keep the viewer much more alert and interested in what is going on. And in case you are wondering, Windows Movie Maker has an easy “pop-up” feature.

4. Smile: Similar to #2 but it always amazes me when I see a business produce a marketing

video where everyone looks like they either are being held captive or last night's dinner is really starting to work its way through. Video is all about personality, so make sure you're happy. Smile often. Laugh on occasion. Remember, consumers don't buy from depressing companies and people. They buy things because they want to feel better.

5. Music is Awesome: I absolutely love music with videos. In fact, my business partner recently helped a company we are working with on a consulting project to produce a "feel-good" video for their bowling alley.

6. Utilize Slow Motion: Slow motion adds another dimension of emotion to a YouTube video. When done the right way, changing the speeds of a video will not only keep viewers more interested, but also allows the producer to accentuate feelings and moods when appropriate.

So there are 6 ways to create "feel good" videos for your business. Such videos are not that difficult to produce. In fact, the pool vacuuming video with my son only took about 1 hour to produce and upload onto YouTube start to finish. That's right, 1 hour.

Now go grab that flip camera of yours and start producing warm, feel-good videos today. I can promise you they'll have a huge impact on your brand, your company, and your bottom line.

How to Make Awesome YouTube Videos for Your Small Business

As you all know, I'm a big fan of YouTube marketing for small businesses. Along with strong textual content, a company's website and brand can be greatly enhanced by using this powerful medium. Unfortunately though, many businesses are not even utilizing this excellent marketing/web 2.0 tool, [which is a topic I covered in-depth in a recent post](#).

But this article is actually written for the small business that wants to produce not just videos, but *good* videos. And frankly, as many of you who have seen YouTube videos before already know, they have a tendency to range just a tad in terms of their professionalism.

Also, my intention here is not to provide in-depth video/editing/special effects/ production tips. Rather, I want small businesses to understand that one does not need a monster marketing budget to produce quality videos. But just adding a few simple components to your videos, your business will stand out from the crowd and you'll be pleasantly surprised with the inevitable results.

I feel strongly that in order for a small biz video to be effective, it should be:

Highly Educational/Informative

Sincere

Fun

Now you may be thinking “Duh Marcus,” but the reality is that most of the small business videos I’ve seen on YouTube and other mediums are done pretty poorly. Most are quite choppy, robotic, and not even very lucid with their information. And although I’m certainly guilty of producing my share of boring and lame videos, I do always strive to be informative, sincere, and have a little fun while I’m at it. But the idea is that with persistence and practice, you will soon understand how to produce excellent videos and your company and brand will benefit greatly because of it.

This being said, here are 7 tips I suggest you utilize to produce effective video. As you read about these techniques, contemplate how you could do a similar production for your business and your products. And ask yourself: Is this video educational? Does the person recording come across as sincere? And was it fun to watch this or was I nearly falling asleep?

Music, music, music:

Have you ever seen the movie Top Gun? How about Dirty Dancing? (Yes, you can tell I’m an 80s guy.) But seriously, when you think of those movies, what scenes come to your head? Chances are the scenes you most remember are the ones where music played a major role.

Simply put, music has a powerful effect on the mood, pace and tone of any video production, whether it is a 10-minute YouTube video or a 2-hour Hollywood blockbuster.

Start with a Preview

Provide a very brief preview of the scenes the viewer is going to see. This technique is an excellent “hook” and does a very effective job in giving the viewer just enough visual information to want to stick around to find out how everything unfolds.

Website Information

Although most companies will put their information in the end during the credits, I always suggest you put your company and site name at the beginning. Why? Because just about everyone that pushes play will get through the first 30 seconds of a video, but many will not make it to the end.

It is also good to mention the website throughout the video in conjunction with the different scenes as they happen.

Pop Ups

Ever since the 1990s and VH1's "pop-up videos," this technique has become a staple of educational videos. And the great thing about adding pop-up text (or pop-down) is the fact that it allows you, the producer, to add text you may have missed while recording the actual video, which is exactly what Jason did with his production. Consumers love facts and information (we are in the information age in case you were wondering) and pop-up text is the perfect technique for fulfilling this need.

Use Humor

Obviously, humor can be a great way to lighten the mood of a video and lead to a viral-like viewing as well. For businesses it is usually a very good idea to have a little humor in every video if possible.

Involve Customers

As I've mentioned over and over again, social proofs are a critical element of any effective marketing plan (see every infomercial ever made for proof of this), which is why businesses should utilize customers, especially happy customers, whenever possible in their videos.

Integrate Still Shots and Slow Motion

Just as music does a great job changing the pace of a video, so do still shots and slow motion. This technique is especially effective at the end of the video to tie everything together.

So there are 7 techniques I suggest you implement into your next YouTube video.

But before I close, I want to remind everyone that by no means do your video productions have to be perfect. In fact, YouTube viewers have come to *expect* imperfection. It almost adds a sense of authenticity. So don't get caught up in too many fine details and set the goal today to start leveraging the great tool of video in your company's web and marketing 2.0 efforts.

Video Marketing and YouTube for Small Business Success: Anyone Can Do It

I got a text at about 10:15 from a customer tonight. It read something like this:

Marcus, my wife and I are just sitting here watching your PoolSchool videos, and we're ready to pull the trigger.

Of course, in this case, *pull the trigger* meant that he and his wife had decided to buy the pool I had quoted them a few days ago. And once again, despite being more expensive than the other quote given by my competitor, they chose us.

But this isn't the only experience I had along these lines today. At a sales appointment this morning I had a most interesting conversation with an incredibly nice and successful guy in his late 30s who owns a prominent consulting firm. Essentially, as we were discussing his potential pool project, he told me this (and no, I'm not exaggerating):

Dude, I've watched all your freaking videos. In fact, I probably hold the record for the customer who has watched the most Marcus Sheridan videos. That's why I know when you speak you're not full of bull#%#%. So just go ahead and tell me what I need.....

Literally, all I could do was laugh when he told me this, as I'll never cease to be amazed by the simple power of video and YouTube marketing for small businesses.

Profound Impact

Yes, I've talked multiple times regarding video marketing for small businesses, but the extraordinary influence this simple and cheap medium can have on consumer brand awareness, as well as consumer confidence, may even supersede that of blogging. And as everyone knows, I stinking love blogging for small businesses.

So why is it that so many small businesses are still not leveraging video? Why are they spending thousands on website designs and redesigns but continually falling flat on their faces? The whole phenomenon is an utter mystery to me quite frankly.

Bigger Ain't Better

Take for example the swimming pool company I beat out in the previous story. The company is the 2nd largest swimming pool installer in the world. They have a huge advertising budget. In 2008 their sales were about \$130,000,000. Notwithstanding, their website stinks. Yep, it's an

utter failure. Sure it has nice photos and pretty flash, but they don't have a blog nor do they utilize video.

That's right, a company with over \$100,000,000 in annual sales of one of the most visually stimulating luxuries in the world (a swimming pool) *doesn't even leverage the power of video on their website*. Honestly, I'm dumbfounded.

This, my friends, is why David beats Goliath everyday on the web. And it's also why you absolutely need to decide right now that video will be your best friend. If you haven't done so already, go out and buy a \$200 camera and start recording everything.

Everything?

Yes, I mean EVERYTHING.

Just as the [curse of knowledge](#) affects regular blogging, it also greatly impacts video production. Don't assume your customers know anything. Put your mind in theirs and start seeing the world out of their eyes. Just by doing this, and by asking yourself the questions that a consumer will always ask as they start to research your product, will give you a wealth of video subjects and ideas. But for those of you who are still a little confused as to what to show and talk about, here are 4 areas to focus on as you get started.

1. You and Your People

Your business isn't just about its products, it's also about you. It's about your employees. It's about the people that make your little part of the world go round. Look at Steve Jobs for example. Why do we keep seeing videos of Steve talking about and launching his "next great product" on the Internet?

The answer is simple. People like putting faces with products. That's what we do. We like stories. We think and make decisions on logical, but also emotional, levels. Apple gets this. That's why Jobs has an incredible cult following. And as Seth Godin would say it, Jobs has created his tribe, and boy does he know how to stay in touch with *his* tribe.

The same thing could be said for thousands of other great companies, but unfortunately these stellar examples are few and far between. Fact is, whether you're a CEO or a small business owner like me, the best way consumers can get to know you and like you before they've ever even met you is through the power video—which is why you're nuts if you're not taking advantage of YouTube right now.

2. Break Down the Product

As you'll see if you visit my swimming pool video library, everything that has to do with fiberglass pools, as well as every stage of their installation, is broken down into some form of video. Show the intricacies of your product. Show how it comes to life. Demonstrate clearly what it's capable of.

3. Life as a Product Owner

Once the consumer owns your product, is that it? Or is there more? Just as swimming pools require upkeep and maintenance, so does just about every other tangible item that a store or business sells. With the case of my business, I made the commitment about 1 year ago that every customer should be able to go to our [video library](#) and find any answer they are looking for if a question or problem ever arises. And after 12 months, we've come very close to completing our goal. Can you imagine the effect this has on a consumer?

4. What Others are Saying

Testimonials are awesome. That's why they're in every infomercial on TV even though most of the stuff that's sold is total crapola. There's just something magical about hearing an *"actual customer"* testify of the superiority of a company's products, people, and services. So if your business' website does not have at least one video of a customer testimonial, then you're sadly missing a tremendous opportunity to gain further trust from potential clients and prospects.

So there are my thoughts on this awesome medium. Please believe me when I say the moment you decide to truly embrace consumer education through video and YouTube will likely be one of the top 2 or 3 most important business decisions of your life.

YouTube, Small Business Domination, and How to Really Drive Your Competition Nuts

How do you know if your YouTube marketing is working?

Answer: In many cases, your competitors will cry foul and complain to anyone that will listen.

How do I know this to be true? Well I live it every day, that's how. And that's I'm going to cover here. I want you to catch a vision of how YouTube videos have the potential to brand you and your business in your industry and cause quite a bit of "fan-mail" in the process.

99% of small businesses are currently not taking advantage of the awesome power of YouTube. This is especially true for the "mom and pop" business across the world like plumbers, home

builders, landscapers, restaurants, auto mechanics, etc, etc.

Dare to be different

The battle of any business these days comes down to their ability to stand out from the competition. I like to use the word *“Distinctives.”* The more distinctives your business has, the more you will draw attention from consumers and separate yourself from all your competitors that have a similar product. YouTube is just one tool that can stimulate such results, and it is certainly a powerful advertising weapon when used effectively. Let me show you exactly what I mean.

In the United States, there are about a dozen prominent fiberglass pool manufacturers, each claiming to be the “best.” When I got into this industry about 9 years ago, I saw that pool shoppers had a hard time distinguishing which pool was superior. And who could blame them? The only evidence they could use to draw a conclusion were pitches from pool guys and fancy manufacturer brochures.

Seeing a huge need to change this fact, I finally bought a simple [FlipUltraHD Camcorder](#) and implemented YouTube in my marketing strategies with the goal to emphasize the features that made our fiberglass pools unique. Although this book is not meant whatsoever to promote my swimming pool company, I will cite the following 2 videos/case studies simply because I want you to see how I have leveraged this medium in an extremely effective manner.

As you watch these videos (and please watch them, otherwise this stuff won’t make nearly as much sense), jot down any inspiration that comes to you on how you might create a powerful YouTube video for your product that will enhance your brand’s awareness and accelerate your business’ growth.

[Fiberglass Pool Molds Video](#)

Results: This was literally one of the first videos that I ever made but man has it been a “doozy” in the fiberglass pool industry. Because my fiberglass pool manufacturer, Leisure Pools, hadn’t done enough in my opinion to create brand separation from their competitors, I decided to take it upon myself to help them out and produce simple videos just like this one. As you can see, it has been viewed about 5000 times (pretty impressive considering this is a VERY niche topic, only relevant for serious fiberglass pool shoppers).

This video was literally done on one take and was as simple as me walking up to the owner of the company in his fiberglass pool factory and telling him I needed him to talk on camera for a few minutes. By the end of our conversation, we had shown some major visual distinctives of Leisure Pools, especially in terms of their mold development and upkeep. You’d be amazed at how many of my customers have said to me something to the sort of, “Yeah Marcus, I saw the

video of that fat guy jumping on the pool. That was really something, Leisure makes a great pool!”

I’ve had multiple sources in the swimming pool industry tell me how all the other fiberglass pool manufacturers have watched this video and tried to come up with ways to refute its claims. In fact, some of the stories that get back to me in terms of how competitors react to this video are down-right hilarious and I’m frankly embarrassed for them.

You’d be amazed at how many people in this industry I’ve had to tell, “Look, if you are so upset with this video because you feel like your product is just as good, then make a video of your own. Otherwise, quit your crying.”

But have other manufacturers or fiberglass pool builders taken the initiative to produce their own YouTube video such as this one??

Alas.....they have not.....but maybe they’ll read this blog of all my not-so-secretive secrets and get with the program.

[Fiberglass Pool Gel Coat Finishes](#)

Results: Boy has this video really caused fury amongst fiberglass pool manufacturers and gel coat suppliers. Once again, I took absolutely factual information and showed it on camera. The funny thing is that a few weeks after this video was released, I was told of an email that was sent out (by the owner of a prominent fiberglass pool manufacturer) to every fiberglass swimming pool manufacturer in the country claiming their need to work together and discredit the video.

Just as with the molds video, all I could do was chuckle and wonder if any of them would actually stop worrying about what I was doing and start fixing the problems within their own company and product line. But again, I’ve been disappointed to find that no one has bothered to take the time for such a simple production.

How to Maximize Effect

Although the act of producing a YouTube video and posting it on your account is a good thing, I’d strongly suggest you also do the following so as to ensure the video has greatest effect and can reach its potential:

Write a small blog regarding the video’s subject and embed the video into the blog itself. (If you’ve never done this before, it’s extremely easy.) This strategy is important because often times, it’s much easier for a blog to make it to the first page of Google than it is for a YouTube video alone to make it to the first page with the same subject matter.

If you are in sales, **give your customers the assignment** to watch your videos before your sales appointment. By doing this, the customer will be extremely informed by the time you actually sit down together and your ability as a sales person to make a sale will be enhanced significantly.

Embed all your YouTube and other videos on your website, not just your blog. Basically, the more places the video is available for viewing, the better its chances of having a huge effect. This is also why you should post any videos you make to Facebook, Twitter, and any other social medium you can think of.

The world will see your greatness.

Now am I implying here that it should be your goal to make enemies with everyone in your industry other than your customers? Well no, of course not. In fact, I never even mention competitor names in my videos.

But what I am suggesting is that you seriously consider the components of your product or company that are unique and different from everyone else and then exploit those differences. Show the world what makes you great. Show the world why they should be using your product or services, **without apologies**. And what will the competition do?

Well there's an old saying that goes something like this: ***People with no opinions make no enemies. Therefore, I choose to make enemies.....***

So my answer is simple. *Yes*, many competitors will not be inviting you over for dinner any time soon. But that's quite alright as your goal is to be the greatest consumer educator and advocate in your industry. Be a giver of knowledge. Do not hoard it.

This is why I write my blog. I know my swimming pool competitors read these articles and wonder why I'd freely share how we've become one of the best and most recognized fiberglass pool installers in the world. But I've always believed that there is room for everyone on top. I have an abundance mentality and feel that truth is not something that should be buried for only one man to know, rather, truth is property of *mankind*.

Time to Get Busy

So start your YouTube domination today. And don't focus on great videos with perfect graphics, music, sound, etc., etc. Although all of that stuff is nice, it's more important that you start putting out information to the public as soon as possible. And the sooner you do this, I can promise you the sooner you will begin to experience incredible improvement in the life of your business.

How to Create an Incredible Personal Branding Video that Sells YOU

We hear a lot of talk about “personal brand” all over the Internet. And no doubt, we should. When it comes down to it, branding, or the way others perceive us, affects almost everything we do in life, be it personal or professional.

This being said, branding has always been something very, very important to me. The bottom line is I want to be known for something, I want to have a message, and I want others to know exactly what that message is.

Tapping into the Power of Video

As a whole, I think we all (at least those of us with blogs and businesses) want the same thing. We want folks to recognize our mission, our talents, and our worth. And more often than not, we completely lean on the *words* we write to transport that message to the world.

This, in my opinion, is selling ourselves short of the resources available to us, especially when it comes to the **power of video**.

What’s crazy to me is I look around the blogosphere and see people that have built pretty decent brands, large audiences, and are receiving speaking opportunities—yet most don’t even have a personal branding video. And for those that do, the video is average at best.

Some of you may remember an article I wrote entitled, “ [Blogging, Serendipity, and How I Met One of My Heroes](#).” In that post, I mentioned my love for West Virginia University, sports, and the voice of the Mountaineers (football and basketball)—Tony Caridi, who serendipitously had been reading my blog for quite some time as he is a HubSpot customer, trying to leverage the power of inbound marketing to take his video production company, [Pikewood Creative](#), to the next level.

To make a long story short, I went to Tony’s company and worked with his staff on their Inbound Marketing, and Tony in-turn produced a video for me and The Sales Lion brand.

The night Tony sent me the completed version of this video I emailed it to my 10-year-old daughter Danielle and asked her to watch it. A few minutes later I got an excited phone call from my wife. She said:

“Oh my goodness! Danielle and I just watched the video and when it finished she was jumping up and down screaming, ‘My dad is so awesome, my dad is so awesome!’”

Needless to say, those words gave me a huge smile. She had been moved by the video, touched in a proud and positive way. I’m sure she’s naturally biased but that is still the type of emotion we want viewers to have when they get a chance to watch such a video.

So how is it done? How does a personal branding video go from being a simple visual clip to a moving expression of one’s unique mission and identity? Along with Tony’s help and input, I’ve come up with 2 essential keys:

The Power of Story

Many writers fail to properly use the power of story, especially personal ones, in their work. Most business also suffer from the same. This, my friends, is a huge error.

In speaking with Tony, “Story” was the first word he mentioned with respect to creating powerful video for individuals and companies. As he put it, “Everyone’s got one, you’ve just got to find it.”

This is why, when we shot the video, Tony asked me question upon question, many of which were similar in nature.

I later found out he was asking these questions because he was digging for the “Marcus Sheridan Story,” and after he and his producers went back and looked at the clips, they knew *exactly* what the story was that needed to be told—**from struggling pool guy to Sales Lion to Speaker/Teacher of Inbound Marketing.**

Amateur vs. Professional

In 2006, before I even knew what inbound marketing was, I had a professional [video](#) made of our swimming pool installation process, our company, our customers, etc. To say the video was above and beyond anything anyone had ever done in the fiberglass swimming pool industry would be an understatement. It was easily 10 years ahead of the competition and since its production on DVD, we’ve sent it out to about 3000 prospective customers over the years.

Without question, the DVD made many, many sales on its own. It’s quality shocked people and

looking back, that was the first time I truly embraced the power of “content” without even knowing what I was doing.

Oh, and did I mention the video cost me about \$35,000? Yeah, back then that was a lot of money. But again, it was worth every penny.

And so it is with personal branding videos. For quite some time, I’ve had a video of me giving a seminar on the side column of my blog. Although this video shows good content and has lead to speaking opportunities, it by no means screams of “high end” production. And because I frankly want to speak to millions of people before it is all said and done, I knew such a video, although a “start,” was clearly not the end goal.

As Tony pointed out, these days, because technology has allowed each and every one of us to be photographers and videographers, many people think they are pros when they are not, thus preventing their visual branding from reaching its full potential.

Although I’m a huge advocate of Average Joes and Janes “just doing it” when it comes to writing blogs or producing video, I do feel that **there is a time and place to let an expert be an expert**. Does it cost a lot more to do it this way? Yes, of course, but the potential monetary gain is also more than worth it in almost every case.

As Tony said, “You can go to the grocery store and buy a really nice steak for \$30 and cook it yourself....or you can go to a 5-star restaurant and have Bobby Flay cook it for \$400. Which one do you think is going to be most memorable?”

Good point Tony.

The video Tony produced has hours and hours worth of editing that went into it. There were two cameras, recording at different levels, during the shoot. The dancing caricatures were completely the idea of Tony and PikeWood, as were the typing scenes, music, pace, etc.

Bottom Line: All I did was talk, and then I sat back and let the artist paint the picture.

Take Your Brand to Another Level

Hopefully you see where I’m coming from with this. Branding is huge. It can make or break your successes as a blogger and/or business owner. And because of this fact, the time for you to

embrace the power of video is **now**. If you can only afford to do something yourself, then do it. If you can afford to do something professional, even though it might be a financial stretch, then by all **means make it happen**.

But embrace video. Tell us about you. **Tell us your story**. What you are is special, and it's about time the world understood that a little better, don't you think?

Chapter 5: How to Build Amazing Community

How to Build Amazing Friendships, Not Just 'Fans', Online

I've come to the conclusion that nothing great happens online without friends and supporters. I'm serious about that—**nothing**. And when it comes to blogging success you can be rest assured that if you don't have a network of people supporting and helping you out, no matter how great your content is, you'll forever be a billboard in the desert.

Tough words? Yeah, maybe so, but true. Which is why you shouldn't simply live by all that “**Content is King**” talk. Sure, good content is critical, but if good content isn't read, it's kind of like that tree in the forest no one heard.....*Did it really fall?*

Catching the Vision of True Community

As I've mentioned again and again here on TSL, I WASTED an entire year of blogging due to my poor networking online. Because I didn't take the time to build relationships, growth never occurred, and boy was that disheartening.

Then, once I started to catch the vision of community and connections, I thought my biggest goal was to simply build fans and followers. And although fans and followers are a big deal when it comes to online success, I've now reached the point where my biggest priority has changed again. Today, my greatest focus is that of building true and lasting **friendships** with amazing people.

So how does it happen? How do we go from gaining fans to true “friends”?

Who Have You Helped Today?

A few months ago I wrote what turned out to be a one of my most popular posts ever on TSL about [how to network online](#) and build your community. In the article, I discussed various stages, or levels, whereby bloggers can build relationships with others, with Level 5 being the highest—the stage by which we move past the simple comments and links and truly look for

ways by which we can help, serve, and impact others.

As an example, the past few weeks have been some of my most enjoyable as a blogger. Why? Because I've made it a point to make at least one phone call every day to a blogger/business owner that has filled out my [contact form](#) and asked me a question. Instead of a generic and quick answer to all the questions I receive, I'll choose one each day to call personally via phone, and often times the reaction I get on the other end of the line is one of shock and amazement.

I don't say this in an effort to sound like some great guy out to save the world, I'm simply saying the reward of taking a few minutes of my day and making a **true personal contact** with someone that completely doesn't expect it is incredibly rewarding, both to the receiver and the giver.

As I mentioned in that post a few months ago, the most important question we can ask ourselves if we really want to develop a stronger network with rich friendships online is this:

Who can I help today?

So simple, yet forgotten by so many. We're so busy writing content and doing the networking basics (simple tweeting and commenting) that we never develop a depth to these relationships.

Be Thoughtful

When it comes down to it, we've got to be thoughtful folks. That's right, *thoughtful*. Thoughtful is when **Ingrid** from [Nitty Griddy Blog](#) sends me a book called *The Tao of Twitter*, completely out of the blue and really without knowing me well, simply because she wanted me to experience success with Twitter, something she knew I'd been struggling with up to that point.

Thoughtful is when someone like **JK Allen** of [Hustler's Notebook](#) takes the time to call me after my first major guest post many, many months ago, and then calls and emails me directly whenever he feels particularly strong about something I've written in the months and weeks since (Wow that guy knows how to make a brother feel good!).

Thoughtful is when someone like [Dino Dogan](#) sends **Srini** from [Skool of Life](#) a BRAND NEW SUIT for his BlogWorld seminar.

Thoughtful is when someone like **Al Smith** of the wonderful new [C.A.R.E movement](#) takes the

time to send me a long and passionate email discussing how one of my recent articles moved him to action.

Thoughtful is when **Danny Iny** of the great blog [Firepole Marketing](#) sends me a business book in the mail because it contains principles related to an article I recently wrote.

Are you starting to see where I'm coming from folks? Yeah, comments, tweets, and "likes" are well and good, but none have the "depth" these thoughtful acts above have when it comes to building true friendships.

Some People are Just Plain Awesome

So that's the challenge folks. Ask yourself each and every day: "Who can I help?" Be thoughtful. Think outside the box. Look to build depth with your online relationships and I can personally testify that you'll not only build fans and followers, but you'll also find yourself building friendships that will last a lifetime.

The Sheer Power of a Blogging Community: It Ain't Just About the Numbers

Have you ever seen one of those bumper stickers that says, "*My 4th Grader Will Beat Up Your Honor Roll Student*" ? Yeah, I bet you have. Bet you laughed too, didn't you? Oh come on, sure you did. What's funny is that as I've been thinking about today's post for the past few weeks, that wonderful little bumper sticker keeps popping up in my mind. Why? Good question. Here goes.....

I get around the blogosphere quite a bit. I love reading the [Danny Browns](#) and [Pat Flynns](#) of the world, but I also love the more obscure, but equally impressive [Diana Bours](#) the blogosphere has to offer (do yourself one favor today and read [this article](#) of hers).

But one thing that I've noticed a time or two is how some bloggers, who occasionally flaunt their very large subscriber bases (certainly not the two aforementioned gents) of 10k or more subscribers, in reality have very little strength and active participation within their community.

But then there are other bloggers with communities and tribes that may not be quite as large—but boy do they make magic happen. Such was the case 3 weeks ago when I asked you, my fellow readers, to allow your creative juices to flow and [come up with a tagline](#) for **The Sales Lion**.

Honestly, I knew I had something special before I made this little petition. I knew that this group of people was a unique one—banded together because of a mutual willingness to help, uplift, inspire, and promote. But I really wasn't sure just how many of you would take time from your busy lives to help some guy who dresses like a lion in public to come up with a simple tagline.

A Community Goes to Work

Notwithstanding my general concerns, I put it in your hands, and honestly had faith that such a communal activity would produce some incredible fruit—**and boy did it ever.**

As soon as I published the question on April 7th, it was amazing how quickly the community went to work. Within just a few days, the blog post had gone over 100 comments and I'd also received double-digit personal emails from readers that have *never before left a comment on TSL.*

Upon reflection of this incredible phenomena, I realized something about my readership that I never fully understood up to that point—**There is a whole other part to this community that cares deeply about the blog,** and even though they may not openly “comment,” they do greatly care.

Receiving personal emails with tagline ideas from readers and business owners from all around the country was quite thrilling to tell you the truth. And it was, in many ways, the first time I caught a glimpse of just how diverse this community is in terms of bloggers, business owners, entrepreneurs, college students, etc. I'm telling you, it was awesome—simply awesome.

A Big, Fat “Thank You”

I would be incredibly remiss if I didn't take a moment to individually thank the folks that contributed information and help. If any of you want to see the power behind an active community, go back to the post and just read the comments. It was a genuine form of teamwork and synergy.

[Christine Crowe](#) was simply amazing (and impressed everyone). She not only took the lead early on by showing she was quite the tagline-extraordinaire, but she also cheered on so many others for their creative thoughts. [Marlee Ward](#) gave it her best. [JK](#) and [John F.](#) did their thing.

People like [Tito Phillips](#) made some strong statements that promoted quite a bit of thought. [Byran Thompson](#) was heavily involved. [Davina Brewer](#) danced around and made everyone

laugh. [Diane Baur](#) kept coming back with more and more ideas. I could literally go on all day about the participation, because when all was said and done, between the emails and the comments, **I received over 90 unique tagline ideas**. Not too shabby, eh? In fact, here are the ideas of some incredible people that commented, and I love 'em all, so here ya go:

[Dan Tyre](#) The Sales Lion-Effective sales strategies for growing businesses

[Gari Liacopoulos](#) We put the roar into your sales!

[Christina Crowe](#) Where Dignity and Honor come together for Thriving Businesses

Where Dignity and Honor Create Success

Ferocious Tips for Business Domination

Royal Guidance for a Better Brand and a Fulfilling Life

Writing with Heart, Blogging with Soul

Where Your Business Kingdom Can Dominate with Integrity

[Mark Harai](#) Empowering People through the Power of Community

[Jeff Molander](#) Motivation & tips so you sell more, more often

[Ari Herzog](#) The Sales Lion is enough of a tag. (This was not a tag idea, it was actually a great point by Ari that really made me think)

[Constantin Gabor](#) The Sales Lion – Sales Tips and Business Advice for Social Media Entrepreneurs.

[Joey Strawn](#) The Sales Lion: Sales. Strategy. Answers.

[Eugene](#) Tips to survive in the Business Jungle

[Danny @ FirepoleMarketing](#) Business: smart, with a lion's heart.

[Marlee](#) The Sales Lion: Ferocious Tips for Dominating Business & Life

[Bryan Thompson](#) The Sales Lion – Where Blogging Meets Passion

The Sales Lion – Success through Value

The Sales Lion – it's not just for pools anymore.

[Joe](#) Relevant Content-Engaged Marketing

[Kerilyn](#) The Sales Lion– Breaking it down to Build it better

[Al Smith](#) I'm not LION, it's time to start TRYIN

Roaring with Solutions

All it takes is HEART and NERVE

From the heart of a Lion

Stop LION around, it's time to ROAR !

Let the King of the jungle Inspire you !

[Dave Heinrich](#) Listen to the Lion ROAR!

Hear the Lion ROAR!

Learn to ROAR like the Lion!

Learn to ROAR like a Lion!

Unleash the ROARING Lion within yourself!

[Matt Mansfield](#) Inbound Marketing with a Bite!

[John Sherry](#) Business with Pride, Marketing with Bite

Bite Size Marketing for Big Business Ideas

Leading the pack in the business jungle

King of the trade tribe

The hunter in business best

[Sanjeev Sharma@Random Raves&Rants of Sanjeev](#) The Sales Lion – Set him among your team

[Diana](#) Marketing Strategies for the Jungle

Ferocious Strategies for Financial Success

Dominate the Marketing Jungle

Marketing Strategies. Heart and Mind

Create the Vision.

Integrity. Strategy. Vision.

Success with Integrity

Hunting Success with Passion

[Ingrid Abboud](#), (In her infinite wisdom said):

Mufasa – Enter the Den! (Get it? get it?)

I pity the fool that touches my pool! (get it? get it?)

Ferocious Sales and Swimming Lessons (pfffff)

(Gotta love that Griddy.....)

[Troy Claus](#) King of the Digital Jungle

Beware of ROI

Learn Inspire Opportunity Niche

Where results are a commodity

Focusing on the MANE objectives

[Jens P. Berget](#) Sharing Passion & Building Trust Through Content

[Riley Harrison](#) For those who want to ROAR through life!

[Brankica](#) **Ruling the online jungle!**

[Rajka Milanovic Galbraith](#) Writing with Heart to Empower People

Empowering People by Blogging w/ Soul

Empowering People through writing with heart and blogging with soul

Empowering People by writing with heart.

[Davina K.Brewer](#) Marketing Prowess. Fierce Leadership. Real Results.

[Dennis](#) The Sales Lion – Effective Sales Strategies for The King in YOU

[Keith Davis](#) The Sales Lion. Committed to business. Devoted to life.

[Danny Brown](#) Because content *is* marketing

[Alex](#) A Social Marketing Carnivore

[Melanie Kissell@SoloMomprenuer](#) Small Biz Tips For King Size Results

[Marlee](#) (again, once she knew I'd fallen in love with Mark's and Christina's ideas)

Empowering Community With Heart & Soul

The Heart & Soul of An Empowered Community

Where People are Empowered Heart & Soul

Where Community Collides with Blogging Heart & Soul

Because sales is about community, connections, heart & soul

But when it all was said and done, most people seemed to be drawn to Christina's "*Writing with Heart, Blogging With Soul*" as well as Mark Harai's "*Empowering People Through the Power of Community*."

What's interesting is that those were my top choices as well. And it was neat to see so many of my readers really drawn to them. But despite the fact that I adored Christina's tagline (and now the whole blogosphere will be snatching it up so I suggest you trademark it quick gal!), as soon as I read Mark's idea there was something within me that just knew it was the one:

"Empowering People Through the Power of Community"

You see, the further I go along with life, and with this blog, the more I realize that it's not about me at all. Yeah, sure I want to be successful and achieve some amazing things, but the only way I'm going to be able to do that is through the sheer power of community. Also, the beauty behind this tagline is that it's one that will grow with the blog as it grows. No matter what subject I delve into down the road, you can be rest assured that it will be about empowering others—be it individuals, groups, or businesses—and that is the focus of The Sales Lion, today, tomorrow, and 10 years from now.

Chapter 6: Using Your Content to SELL

I Teach, Therefore I Sell

First of all, I'd like to thank [Rene Descartes](#) for his inspiration behind the title of this blog post. I do believe that if Descartes was around today he'd be thrilled with the direction of sales and marketing around the world. But to the point of this post.....

In this rapidly evolving Web/Sales/ Marketing 2.0 era, the days of slick tricks and manipulative techniques are going the way of the dinosaur. Consumers, more than ever, are getting smarter. They are more informed and prepared than ever. And they're just waiting to be fed.

And what do I mean by "fed"?

Well as we've talked about time and time again on this blog, *he who produces the most remarkable and valuable content in his field is king*. That's how it works—pure and simple.

Look at Steve Jobs.....Seth GodinWayne Dyer.

All of these men do what they do in extraordinary ways. [Steve Jobs](#) has dedicated his life to finding enriching technology that will bless the lives of others.

[Seth Godin](#) is the king of marketing today. The guy produces bestselling books faster than I can write a blog post. Every day he sits down at his computer and gives the world valuable and relevant information. And he gives it to us for free. No cost at all. Unbelievably awesome.

[Wayne Dyer](#) has over 30 best-selling books in the field of Self-improvement, Awareness, and Intention. The man has been doing this for years and years. Giving, producing, teaching, writing, speaking, helping, and persisting.

And what do all these men have in common? Although one could argue they share many, many traits, I'd like to mention just one:

They are passionate teachers. Their lives are built around giving other people information and tools to enhance the life experience. And not only do they love to teach, but they've been doing it

consistently every day for years and years.

And what has been the result of their labors?

Well other than the fact that each has positively affected millions and millions of people in their field, all are incredibly rich. And I'm not saying a little rich. These guys are multi, multi-millionaires. And for lack of a better term, these guys, among many appropriate titles, are great salesmen.

Selling and Prosperity are Beautiful

Now you might not feel that "salesmen" is the proper description for these men. My answer to this is simple: Selling is a beautiful thing, especially when it's a result of great teaching. Selling is not a bad word. Rather, it's poetry in motion. These men attract prosperity into their lives through their labors.

And the wonderful thing is they deserve it. In fact, they deserve every stinking penny they make. Heck, each one has made me way more money than I'll ever give to them. This is why I don't hesitate to give them my money. They are great teachers that offer great value which to me is worth whatever the asking price.

A Gift Economy

Today we live in a [gift economy](#). The more we give, the more we'll get back in return. It's beautiful synergy. Thrilling in the very least.

Zig Ziglar used to say, "If you help enough people get what they want, they will in-turn help you get *everything* you want."

Wow this statement is awesome. I've seen it work in the incredible lives of the men mentioned above but I've also seen the principle hold true for entrepreneurs, sales professionals, and small businesses across the world. No matter what the profession, this principle of teaching to sell will always hold true.

Why?

My friends will at times ask me why I blog so much. As I really don't do much "hard selling" here at The Sales Lion or my other blogs, some are confused as to what my ultimate goals are.

Fact is, I absolutely know, without any doubt, this blog is leading me down a new path of

greatness. Just as my other blog catapulted my company to the top of its field, this blog is and will be the portal by which I can bless the lives of others. It is the means by which I can help small businesses to overcome the traps that so many succumb to. It is the way by which I can help professional sales people and marketers elevate their skills and reach results they never dreamed possible. And finally, this blog is my greatest learning tool. It pushes me. It forces me to think. It makes me better.

Abundance

But as I continue to walk this road of giving and teaching, the inevitable results will be abundance for myself and others. This is what life is all about. It's a universal law and is why I'm terribly grateful for the fact that I'm alive during the information age. Never before can so many people give value to others simply by the stroke of a key. It's unbelievable when you actually consider the beauty of it all.

So my challenge to you is to *give*. Give your knowledge freely. Know you'll get it back 100-fold. Think abundantly. Be the best teacher you can be. Teach, teach, teach. And as you become a great teacher in your field, know that you'll taste success. Know that you will sell freely and easier than ever before because you've established incredible relationships with incredible people. This is the world we now live in. Smile and embrace it.

Assignment Selling: The Essential Sales Technique of the Information Age

Have you ever heard the phrase "Assignment Selling"? Chances are, you haven't, but let me assure you it may be the most important part of your business' marketing and sales success in the future.....**that you're not currently doing**. Allow me to explain.

We've been talking a ton lately about content, education, and thinking like a consumer by answering *their* questions.

No doubt, the phrase "Content is King" is the latest rage, as well it should be. But what happens when content and information never get read? What happens when a consumer just breezes through it without truly making the effort to absorb its teachings?

The answer, as we all know, is: nothing. Nothing happens. Nobody learns. No progress is made. When it comes down to it, "***Content is King***" needs to be paired with the phrase "***As Long as Someone is Actually Listening.***"

To explain what I'm trying to say here let's look at my other field—the swimming pool

industry, as an example.

Often times prospects will excitedly call my store or send us an email requesting to have someone out to their house so as to give them information and a quote on a pool. And in most cases for just about every swimming pool company across the world, the process of setting up this appointment, other than a few “find-out” questions, is rather pitiful.

I say pitiful because I used to be pitiful in my approaches with customers as well. They’d call, we’d talk, and bam—appointment made. But before long I realized I was making one grave mistake—the homeowner didn’t have enough responsibility on *their* end. In other words, they were looking for someone to teach them in their home what they could already learn from the countless pages of content on my website.

Teaching vs. Selling

Because of this lack of responsibility, I found myself spending too much time teaching prospects on sales calls and not enough time selling. And regardless of what anyone in the world might say, **selling, and not teaching**, is what ultimately pays the bills.

Upon realizing the error of my ways, I became much bolder with clients. In fact, I started giving them “homework” before I’d come out to their house.

Yes, that’s right, I did just say *homework*.

For example, before I go on a sales appointment with an inground pool prospect I’ll send them the following information. Our company reference list of over 600 customers, a 50 page eBook all about swimming pools and options 3-5 Significant Articles from our company blog

As you can see, this is a lot of information—as well it should be. If someone is serious about a pool and knows they are getting ready to spend 30-70k, then they likely don’t want to make a mistake on their purchase—hence the call for great content and information.

When I set a sales appointment, I tell the prospect I expect them to read the information sent and check on the references as well.

And what if they say they don’t have time to read the info or seem uninterested?

Then I don’t go out to the home. Pure and simple.

When it comes down to it, if a consumer isn’t willing to do their due diligence when researching

an expensive product or service, this means only one thing:

All they care about is price.

And as I like to say—When it comes to running a successful business, ***Price Ain't Nice.***

Since I made the switch to assignment selling a few years back, I now find sales appointments are much, much better. Prospects are clearly informed. Trust, because of the content, has already been established long before I arrive. And what about closing rates?

As you might imagine, they've shot up drastically as well.

Start Giving “Homework” Today

So my question to you is what learning assignments do you give to prospects before your first sales meeting? Are you just asking a few simple questions or are you making sure the prospect demonstrates effort on their part as well?

If you're not yet implementing this strategy into your sales system, please start today. Come up with some type of “homework” for your clients and watch the dominoes fall as they may. I can promise you that if you take this leap of faith you will be greatly benefited and you'll spend much more time selling vs. teaching, you'll be happier, and your wallet will reap the benefits.

Why You Should Start Writing, Stop Hiding, and Quit Worrying About the Competition

This post has been building within me for months but finally boiled over the other day when Jens from [Sly Marketing](#) asked me the following question with regard to blogging and inbound marketing on my last article about [content creation](#):

I have recently talked to a few guys at a print design company, a fairly successful company with about 30 employees. They asked me about marketing, and I told them about inbound marketing and blogging. They were skeptical, because they didn't want to share anything with their competitors. What if they just copied everything they did?

Although to someone like you or I that actually sees the “big picture” of content and inbound marketing, there is a surprising number of business owners in this world that are afraid they'll be giving too much of themselves to their competitors if they embrace such a marketing paradigm. To these business owners, I offer you this suggestion:

Pull Your Head Out of Your Butt

Sorry for the strong imagery, but it's the truth. The idea that other companies and businesses will copy you and get an advantage because of the fact that you teach, inform, and inspire is quite possibly the dumbest thing in the history of the world. In fact, here are 5 keys to remember if you're hedging over the idea as to whether blogging and inbound marketing are right for your business:

5 Reasons You Should Stop Worrying About the Other Guy and Worry More About Yourself:

1. You're Nothing Special (Part I): Ouch. That's right. Your company is nothing special until you actually do something special. And what's special today? Special today is giving more than anyone else. Special is embracing video, blogging, and social media in an effort to be the most informative company you can be. Special is willing to put yourself out there in the realm of public voice and thought and participate in the conversation. Unless you're doing this today, **you're nothing special.**

2. You're Nothing Special (Part II): So here we are again, but this time we're talking about the way your company does what it does. Let me give you an example: I was once talking to a manufacturing company about Web 2.0 principles. I told the owner the first thing I'd suggest is that he take video of every little thing his company does in the factory, how they do it, and what makes them so dang good. And do you know how he responded? If you guessed, "I don't want my competitors to see how we do things," then you were right. After wanting to splash a bucket of cold water on the guy's head, I simply told him the following:

You're not freaking Coca-Cola. You make stuff a lot like everyone else. So stop thinking your stuff is such a secret when it's not.

So many businesses are so worried about hiding "important information" from their competition that all they're really doing is hiding their value and "story" from the all-important consumer.

It's crazy. If companies and manufacturers would start realizing this and stop paying so much attention to what their competition supposedly knows, then maybe we'd hear a lot less complaining about how bad the economy is and more talk of profits in the marketplace.

3. You Can Lead a Horse to Water but You Can't Make Him Drink: Because of the way we embraced blogging, video, and inbound marketing in the swimming pool industry a few years

ago, my company and I became the “voice” of the fiberglass pool industry.

And once we did this, guess what I then started doing? If you guessed that I shared every business “secret” I knew here on TSL, then you’re right. Many people thought I was crazy. “Why would Marcus show everyone how he’s had so much success?” is a question that has been posed quite a few times over the past year. And the answer to the question is simple—**Most business owners are lazy marketers**. They’re the horse that doesn’t drink. I can spell success out for them all day long but the majority (again [Pareto’s Law](#) always proves true) simply don’t do what it takes to be successful. Amazing.....sad.....yet very true.

4. There’s Room for Everyone On Top: This may come across as a bit utopic but it’s true. Having an abundance mentality, I firmly believe there’s room on top for everyone. Thus, if I can help more companies to succeed, the laws of karma will in-turn bless me and my business as well.

Why is it that way? I have no idea; I just know that it is. Sure, it takes guts to show the world the right way to run a business, build a product, or offer a service—but it’s this same mentality that blesses everyone while thrusting your company to the top of its field.

5. The Train is Already Leaving the Station: If businesses want to live in fear of great marketing, then they must understand this—The train called inbound marketing (blogging, video, etc) has left the building. Either get on or be left behind. Or, to put it in my most eloquent manner—**It’s time to pooh or get off the pot folks.**

Success is not going to wait for coward business owners. Success will enter the lives of those persons that have a teacher’s mentality. So, to all you business owners out there right now that are looking down this path of marketing and debating its merits, **look no further**. The time is now. Get on the train, there’s still just enough time.

Blogging, “The Force,” and How to Sell Like a Jedi Knight

So we’re all starting to get it by this point—blogs, and the content a business produces, have become imperative to a company’s success in the 21st century. But despite the fact that so many individual entrepreneurs and corporate marketing departments are beginning to appreciate the impact said content can have on SEO, branding, sales, etc., I still have a strong feeling that 99.9% of the world simply **doesn’t catch the vision** of the magical difference content can make.

When I think of the word “content,” *Star Wars* comes to mind. More specifically, “**The Force**.” Ahh yes, the magical “force” that, at some point or another, we all imagined having when we

were kids growing up. When referring to “The Force” Obi-Wan described by saying, “It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.” Hmmm, deep words Mr. Kenobi, you would have been quite the content marketer.

You see, *content* is today’s “force.” It binds us. It penetrates us. And it certainly brings us together. But not only that, it convinces clients, who otherwise would never see your side, to commit to do exactly what you’re saying.

Real Life Application

The other day I had a business owner call me who had read a few of my articles on TSL. Like many people I talk to, he was extremely worried about his web marketing presence and felt completely hopeless in terms of his ability to get with the information age. He had no website. He felt embarrassed by this fact when asked by customers. And he saw his competitors passing him by.

But because of the content he’d seen in the articles on this site, and the feelings he derived from them, he was motivated to give me a call.

Such is sales. Prospects have problems, businesses have solutions.....or, better stated, *we hope* businesses have solutions.

By the end of our initial conversation, the prospect (we’ll call him Jeff) told me he liked what he’d heard but still wasn’t sure what he was going to do. This was my reply:

I understand your concerns Jeff. Embracing blogging, content, and Web 2.0 principles can be a bit intimidating. So this is what I want you to do. I’m going to email you when this call is over 10 articles that I’ve written here on TSL. These articles apply specifically to the situation you’re currently in. I expect you to read them tonight. Once you read them, you will realize you’re capable of doing this and then I suspect you’ll call me tomorrow and commit to a contract.

Now some of you may think this statement to Jeff was a little bold. After all, I gave him an assignment and then told him that the result of said assignment would be that he would call me and want to move forward with a contract.

Here’s the thing—Most sales professionals try to “pitch” there way to success. In other words they pitch their product or service so much to a client that eventually the client either gives in or tells them to go away.

Personally, I don’t believe much in this concept. I’d rather give [great content](#) to a prospect, put the onus on them to take some initiative and read it (or view it), and then allow “the force” to

bind us.

The End Result

So how did the story with Jeff end up? Well, the next day, Jeff called me and this is what he said: Marcus, I was up till late, late last night reading your blog. And then I got up this morning and read some more. You were right. I'm convinced. Let's get this started right away.

That was it folks. "The Force" wins again, and balance is restored to the universe.

So here's the challenge: Are you using your content like you could be? Is it your greatest selling tool like it should be? I can promise you that if you'll simply shift your paradigm and start to view your business' content as its greatest asset, everything will begin to change, and maybe, just maybe, you'll make Uncle Ben Kenobi proud.

Content Marketing Tipping Points

Something magical happened to me in January of 2011. As I was reviewing all my stats and analytics from 2010, I stumbled across a very unique number that has changed my business and lead to our most profitable year ever.

But before I explain what I found, a little background information is in order. For the past 10 years, before I started teaching others about marketing, I was a "pool guy." Yep, that's right, I own a swimming pool company that installs inground swimming pools throughout Virginia and Maryland. During this time period, we've seen some major ups and downs, with none worse than the economic collapse of late 2008.

But with this crash we also experienced one of our greatest discoveries—**content marketing**. In fact, once we embraced content, and decided to become the leaders of the swimming pool industry (in terms of consumer education), our blog, website, and business exploded. Today, the site is the #1 trafficked inground swimming pool website in the world.

One Little Number Can Change Everything

Getting back to my original paragraph though, as I looked at the 2010 analytics, and compared all the leads versus the leads that had turned into actual customers, I noticed a trend that I'd never picked up on before.

To make a long story short, **if a lead read at least 30 pages of our company website, the closing rates, if I went out on a sales appointment, would shoot up to nearly 80%.** Considering the average closing rate for a sales appointment is 10-15% in the swimming pool industry, this number was astonishing.

Literally, with almost every “customer” I looked at, the number of page views was 30 or above. Heck, some were 75, 100, and even 250 pages viewed!

Once I realized there was a direct correlation between number of page views and closing rates, our entire marketing strategy changed as a company. We now dedicated all of our efforts to not only producing great content, but making sure our prospects saw and read this content—which would therefore help them reach this magical “**tipping point**” and almost guarantee the likelihood of the sale.

A Principle for any Industry

Also, once I began to investigate further and watch this “content tipping point” number in action, I realized the principle would apply to other businesses just as well as it did mine.

This being said, I started teaching on my marketing blog and in seminars the principle of content tipping points, and with each event came incredible feedback. As business owners heard the principle, they would go back to their web analytics and start to see that they, too, had a “tipping point” for their product or service. Once they understood what this number was, they would then engineer a marketing and sales process that would be centered around said number.

Learning *Your* Content Tipping Points

Although I could literally talk about the principle of content tipping points all day, if you’d like to know what yours is for your business, there are basically 3 things you’ll need to do:

1. Produce Content!

When we started blogging as a pool company, our website consisted of a total of 20 pages. Today, it has about 750. Had we not produced all of this content, we never would have known just how prolific some leads would be in terms of research (page views). We also would not have had the chance to realize that 30 pages was the core number for all of our content marketing efforts.

So if you're not blogging, producing video, and creating other informational works on your company website, it's time to get to it!

2. Beefy Analytics

Some of you might be wondering how I knew the page view numbers of our leads, which is a very good question. You see, something like Google Analytics tracks "visitor behavior," not "lead behavior." In order to do that, you're going to need more. In my case, I use HubSpot analytics. Whenever a visitor comes to my website and fills out a form, they then become a "lead" and I can now start tracking their behavior.

If your company's web analytics do not track lead behavior, I'd strongly recommend you consider a platform that will give you much more than you're currently getting from the basic Google Analytics.

3. Web Forms

In conjunction with #2, if you don't have places on your website where visitors can fill out forms (contact, free reports, blog subscription, etc.) then you won't be able to get the information needed to track their behavior, no matter what type of analytic platform you might be using. So be sure to give your readers ample opportunity and offers to be able to gather their information in exchange for your excellent content and services.

In closing, if you're looking to take your content marketing to another level, I'd strongly urge you to do your best to find out what your "content tipping points" are and then create a sales and marketing campaign built around this incredibly important number. By so doing, your sales cycle will likely shorten while your margins increase, and this year may just be one of the best years ever for your business.

Chapter 7: Finding Writing Inspiration

10 Inspiring Activities for Small Business Bloggers and Content Marketers

Whether you're a small business blogger or content marketer you've been there before. It's the land of mushy-brain. It's the moment of frustration when creativity and innovation have left our grasp. For some it's called writer's block. For others it's called burn-out. Each person and profession has its own vernacular, but the principles are the same for all.

As writers, or maybe better stated as *teachers*, we are all in a constant quest to discover more creativity and life-changing ideas. For some of us such original thought may come easily. For others it can be a struggle. Regardless, we all at some time or another reach that moment when we've ran out of ideas. We're spent. The well has run dry.

Such stagnation can be seriously harmful to any blogger/content marketer. So the question is what can we do? How can we always be on our best "mental game"? How can we be an ever-flowing fountain of information and ideas—something we all know is the key to some of the most successful and effective bloggers in the world?

Considering I write 5 or 6 blog articles a week on top of working at my "day job," like everyone there are times when my ideas get a little stagnant and my inspiration flat-lines. This being said, I've come up with 10 ideas here that may inspire you as a writer, marketer, or even as a business owner.

Stop Talking, Start Listening

When was the last time you sat down with one of your clients or readers and asked them what *they* wanted to talk about? What are their thoughts, likes, dislikes, etc. regarding your product or industry? What's important to *them*?

Because each one of us in some degree or another suffers from the curse of knowledge, it can be easy to lose touch with our customer base and readers as we stop thinking as they do. This is why having a simple conversation with a customer can work wonders in the inspiration department and is something that needs to be a constant in the life of any "teacher" (blogger).

Get a Workout

Although many of the ideas mentioned here are related to physical activity, 20-60 minutes of daily exercise can work wonders for the mind, body, and soul. Personally, I work out for 1 hour every night on my elliptical when I get home from work. Despite almost always being dead tired when I begin this late workout, within just a few minutes my body and mind recover and soon I'm completely refreshed.

These workouts, along with my sauna routine (keep reading), are essentially the spark to all my blog ideas and give me the energy needed to produce content late into the evening when almost everyone else in my time zone is asleep. So whether it's P90X, yoga, or whatever else form of exercise you may prefer, make sure you're doing at least something physically active each and every day.

Trade Shows

I love trade shows. Every industry has them and sadly most people don't use them for more than a social gathering. Although such social benefits to these events are great (especially when mingling with other great and inspired teachers), I've always found their classes and other educational workshops to be a breeding ground for great ideas. In fact, some of the best decisions I've ever made with my business, as well as many of the articles I've ever written, have been a direct result of a thought received during a trade show.

Go For a Walk

A walk may be the simplest activity in the world yet so many of us have forgotten its benefits over the years as the rigors and stresses of life set in. The next time you find yourself stuck in a rut and unable to start or finish an article, get up and go for a stroll. I can promise you the time away will make a huge difference upon return.

Take a Shower

Showers are awesome. They wake us up and they invigorate. This is also why I'll often times take a shower before I sit down to write. Sound weird to you? Try it sometime; it works

Sauna

Dang I love to sauna. I know most readers don't have one but if you've ever used one before on

a regular basis you understand very clearly the mental and health benefits to these incredible devices. Not only does a 30 minute sauna session burn 300-500 calories, it also elevates mental alertness and blood flow. I've had a sauna in my home for the last 7 months and it's one of the best investments I've ever made.

Call a Friend

We've all got friends. And hopefully, we've all got someone that will hear us out and give us feedback when needed. Some bloggers and content marketers try to do everything alone. They solely depend on themselves for ideas and inspiration. They only look at the mirror when they've hit a rut. Do yourself a favor and don't be that guy. Learn to lean on others when necessary. Don't be afraid of feedback. Embrace it. Seek it. The advice and suggestions of others can make a profound difference on our ability to constantly create fresh, remarkable content.

Take Advantage of Drive Time

Because I'm often times in my car 3-6 hours a day, what I do with this time can make or break my creative abilities. Sometimes, it can be tempting to just sit back and listen to Sports Talk Radio for a few hours, but the simple fact is such an activity will not promote any mental/spiritual enlightenment on my part whatsoever. This is why I spend over 95% of my drive time listening to some type of self improvement/inspiring book, lecture, etc. Although my example may be a little extreme for some who don't drive nearly as much, we can all turn our vehicles into a "library on wheels."

Keep a Journal

Most people never keep a record of their life and thoughts. Frankly, this is quite sad considering what one can learn when they look back on old thoughts, paradigms, and experiences and write about new ones. Journals are also great for brainstorming and can often times unleash one's creative juices when stuck in a rut.

Learn From the Great Ones

In every field, there are people, writers, and organizations that stand above the rest. Look at Steve Jobs. Consider Seth Godin. Their success is no accident, and their behaviors and actions are often the perfect example of "The Right Way." Sometimes, we don't need to reinvent the wheel, we just need to watch it's beauty and follow its example.

An Author's Peril: How to Keep Writing and Blogging When No One is Reading

I published my first paperback book when I was in college. It was of the self-help type, and after 18 months of hard work to write it and find a publisher, I could only dream big as to the success my first literary work would eventually have. But as the saying often goes, *it's a good thing I didn't hold my breath.*

Despite my high hopes, the book never took off, barely reaching 1000 sales. Sure, I was happy I'd have a little treasure for my posterity to look back on, but at the same time I felt it had generally failed in terms of influencing other people for good.

I published my next book about 3 years later. This time, I *knew* the book would take-off. It was the only of its kind and there was literally no doubt in my mind that it would end up being a best seller in its niche.

Soon thereafter, disappointment set in again. Yes, it did sell decently. Heck, it even eclipsed 5000 copies, a number that over 95% of all published books never reach. Notwithstanding, those numbers seemed so small for a book that I completely felt to my core would affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of people for good.

I was perplexed. Again, my desire to help others on a very large scale had fallen short. As before, a part of me was proud yet the other half felt genuine disappointment and a little sadness with the results.

A Story of a Fish

All of us have heard the story of *Moby Dick*. Yes, that's right, the tale of a whale and an interesting guy that called himself Ishmael. But what so many fail to realize about this novel is the fact that its author, Herman Melville, only experienced moderate success during his lifetime. In fact, *Moby Dick* was initially panned by most critics and did not explode in popularity and appreciation until the 1920s, roughly 30+ years after its author's death.

Why did Melville's epic novel take so long to catch fire? That's a great question, but in reality it's just one of thousands of literary works that did not get noticed upon initial release.

I'm not inferring here with this example that we're all going to die before someone actually notices our literary genius. No, not at all. What I am trying to say though is that sometimes we simply cannot control outside forces. Timing and fate are very funny things. Just recently, as a matter of fact, I was reminded of this truism:

There's a Melville Moment in all of us

About 10 months ago I was getting my kids to bed when the phone rang. Not recognizing the number, I curiously answered the call and was surprised to find on the other end the editor of a prominent magazine. To my amazement and splendor, the gentleman said he had found my book to be the premier work in its class, and wanted to buy its rights so as to produce a shortened, article version for the magazine. As you might imagine, I quickly responded in the affirmative, grinning from ear to ear the rest of the evening.

A few months later the magazine was published with my article, and with its circulation of 1 million readers in 40+ languages, you can imagine the joy I felt. Finally, the teachings in the book were helping the masses of people I had envisioned 7 years before but at this point had all but given up on.

Keep Plowing Forward

I mention this little story because as writers, teachers, and communicators we all have our ups and downs. Our passions and dreams can be floating on clouds one minute and then buried in the deepest abyss the next. But the next time you think to yourself no one is reading or appreciating your work, remember that although you and I cannot always control time, we can control the art we produce. So keep writing. Don't give up on yourself, your blog, your business, or your dreams. Yes, there will be tough moments, but as the famous saying goes:

I never said it would be easy, I only said it would be worth it.....

So what's your story? Do you ever feel like you should just stop writing, blogging, or owning your business? How have you overcome these tough times and managed to find your "Melville Moments"?

7 Ways to Stop Staring at the Screen and Start Writing Your Next Great Blog Article

It's time to write. Your next scheduled article to post is already a day late on the calendar. You're nervous, frustrated, and feeling the pressure. All you see is a white screen in front of you. Call it writer's block. Call it burn-out. Whatever you call it, you've got it. And you're frustrated.

Such a scene is all too common with many bloggers and content marketers out there. Simply put, for a writer, there is almost nothing worse than the inability to **produce**. And when we can't seem to produce, the tension and frustrations can throw our whole world for a loop.

For the last few years of my life I've been blogging. Beyond the scope of running my swimming pool company and writing about 200 articles during this time, I've also written over 300 articles on The Sales Lion.

A kind gentleman who follows both of these blogs asked me a simple question recently :
"Marcus, how the heck do you do it?"

Good question. In fact, it's a question I've been thinking about myself lately because the truth is it's not hard for me to constantly produce new and original articles. Heck, if my mind had its choice, I'd write an article here on The Sales Lion every day but I realize that 3 articles a week is the perfect balance for most readers, so I'll just continue to build ideas upon ideas of possible articles and add them to my little list of "Future Posts."

But let's talk about this for a second. How can a blogger constantly come up with fresh and informative content without hitting the wall and losing his or her mind in frustration? Here goes.....

7 Butt-Kicking Ways to Stop Staring at the Screen and Start Writing Your Next GREAT Blog Article

1. See a Lesson in Everything: I follow many blogs on the Internet. And one habit I see many fall into is they just start saying the same thing over and over again in each article without integrating personal experiences into their writings. This, my friends, is a HUGE mistake.

You may have noticed that almost every post here on The Sales Lion relates a recent experience I've had in my life. Literally, I go about my day *looking* for life's lessons. To me, and I really mean this, every act that I'm a part of throughout a day has a morsel of truth that comes along with it.

More than anything, this is why so many bloggers struggle. When I hear a blogger tell me they simply don't have rich learning experiences I tell them they're wrong and their problem isn't a lack of great experiences and events in their life, it's a lack of recognizing and gleaning from said experiences. If you simply learn this one skill I can promise you'll never look at a blank screen on your computer again.

2. Become a Master at Thinking Like a Consumer: For many businesses, this is huge. That's why I've talked so much about this skill in past articles. Business owners and marketers constantly assume that consumers know more than they really know, which therefore limits one's ability to teach, teach, and teach some more. The key here is to ask yourself every possible

question (none are too basic) a consumer might have regarding your product or service and then start writing about it. I know this sounds like common sense but like the phrase says, “*Common sense is sadly uncommon.*”

3. Don't be So Dang Rigid: I'm all for having a blog schedule and for planning ahead, but I'm also a huge advocate of allowing yourself to feel inspired and follow those promptings when they come. For example, there have been times when I've started an article that I had planned only to find that my passion and thoughts at that moment were elsewhere, on another topic. Usually, this is because I just had another one of those powerful “life lessons” mentioned in #1 above and because it's so fresh in my mind, that's what I need to be writing about in that moment. So be flexible. Allow inspiration. Listen always to your inner voice.

4. Get to Know Your Body and Brain: I know, this one sounds kinda weird but stick with me for a second. We all suffer from fatigue, whether it is mental, physical, or spiritual. For me, because I write so much and my brain is constantly on overdrive, there are moments when I can see that if I try to write that second, the effort will be too great because my mind/body is “off” or simply tired. It's in these moments that I've learned to immediately stop what I'm doing and go for a walk, wrestle with my kids, hop on the elliptical, call a friend out of the blue, etc. By simply “taking a break,” your mind and body will get a needed re-charge and you'll be off to the content races once again.

5. Forget Perfection and Just Write: Too many people want to be perfect when they write. I got past that a longtime ago and accepted the reality that *I ain't no Victor Hugo*. I know that I've got important things to share with the world and a few writing or communication imperfections are simply not going to impede my progress. So don't be so hard on yourself. Write.....then edit.....then smile.....then push publish.

6. Choose Passion Every Time: Remember, if you're blogging just to make money than your business model is doomed to fail.....miserably. Money is not a great motivator. Yes, it can get us excited but after a while, it becomes a curse. Do I make money because of The Sales Lion? Yeah, sure I do, but this blog isn't about the money. I *have* to write this stuff. It's literally begging me to exit my finger tips. This is passion, and I sure hope you feel the same about what you write.

7. Write with a Smile: Don't even ask me to explain this one, because I can't. But trust me, it works. The next time you're in a little funk and the cursor doesn't seem to be moving, smile. And I'm not talking about a partial grin here folks, I'm talking about a big, fat smile. I promise that when you do this some crazy thing starts to happen in your brain and everything will just get easier. (I told you I couldn't explain it.)

I hope these 7 tips will help you in your efforts to be consistently great at blogging. They may take a little time to learn, but take it from me that I know they work and I use each habit every single day.

The Misconception that is Inspired Writing and Blogging

Around 9:30pm last Monday night my wife and I were having a discussion. It went something like this:

Nikki: What's on your work schedule tonight?

Me: Well, I need to post something on The Sales Lion tomorrow but I honestly am not sure what I'm going to write about.

Nikki: Oh, I'm sure you'll think of something, you always do.

Me: Yeah, I hope so.....(after a thoughtful pause) Maybe I'll write about success habits for the new year.

Nikki: There, just like I said, you always do.

This Ain't So Bad

Shortly after our conversation, I was sitting in my downstairs office, smacking the keys of my laptop, and pensively thinking about the habits that had made such a difference in my life this year. And as quickly as my fingers could type, before I knew it there was laid out in front of me a list of 20. With almost no previous thought of what I was going to be writing that night, the words were now taking care of themselves.

About 45 minutes in, the first draft was done. Never once had I stared at the clock. To me, it felt more like 10 minutes.

But there they were, 1700 words, and after reading the draft, a surprising thought came to mind. "Wow, this ain't too bad."

Frankly speaking, I knew it was good. No, not a good as in "*Look at my writing, it rocks*" but rather a "*These words have just been waiting to find their page*" type of good.

Those of you that have been writing and blogging for some time know exactly what I'm talking

about. Sometimes your stuff is just OK and you know it. On other occasions it's "pretty good." But then there are the moments when everything seems to come together and you look back and say, "Wow, I just wrote that??"

This, my friends, is inspired writing.

The Results

The next day, once [the post](#) was published, I found my intuition had not led me astray. Quickly, personal emails started coming in. Twitter started to bustle. And Facebook really began to work its magic.

In fact, in less than a 24-hour period, the post received over 1000 visits from Facebook alone.

For some of the bigger bloggers out there, this number may seem like chicken-feed, but for me it was a big deal. After all, I usually get just under 1000 visits from Facebook over the course of an entire month.

Within 72 hours, the post had become my #1 trafficked article ever on The Sales Lion, and had also been tweeted and "liked" more than any other previous post. Furthermore, it was a lightning-rod for private emails of people telling me how it how touched them in some way, with the word "inspired" coming up again and again.

Just Start Writing

I don't say these things with any intent to brag here my friends, I only mention them to make this critical point:

If I hadn't started writing, the inspiration never would have occurred, and none of the "good stuff" would have ever happened.

Seriously, think about that for a second.

How many times have you said to yourself: "Oh, I really don't have anything good to talk about today and so therefore I'm not going to blog"?

We've all been there—**every single one of us.**

Last Monday night, as I was discussing this subject with my wife Nikki, it would have been very, very easy to simply “pass” on the article and look for lightning in a bottle some other day. The inspiration, at least at first, didn’t appear to be present.

But again, that’s not how inspiration normally works. In fact, the idea (shared by many) that we should only write and blog “when we feel inspired” or “have something amazing to say” is a complete falsehood, and it’s certainly not the M.O. of the majority of the greatest writers and bloggers in the world today.

The Key

So here’s my writing advice to you:

1. Set a writing/blogging schedule.
2. When the time comes, open up your laptop.
3. Once open, start hitting keys.

As for the “inspiration,” well I guess we’ll just have to wait and see if it decides to join the party.

Chapter 8: Writing and Communicating Like a Champion

How to Learn to Love Writing, Blogging, and Content Marketing

If someone were to ask you how much you enjoyed the process of writing, what would you say? Do you like it? Do you love it? Or is it a chore that you know needs to occur so as to produce content and continue to reach the personal or business blogging goals you've set for yourself or your business?

A Writer's Journey

As I was driving home today from a 3-day business meeting that completely consumed all my time and labors, I felt something within me calling out. Yes, my writing instincts had been pushed aside for the first time in many months. Needless to say, they were ready to be released.

While driving in my car and analyzing these feelings a little smile came to myself as I realized just how much of a mighty change has been wrought within me over the past 2 years.

You see, I used to abhor writing. I can remember those 500 word book reports we had to do back in middle and high school that were such a tremendous challenge. Later on in life, while in college, my English instructor flat-out told me I wasn't very good at writing. Was he mistaken? Likely not, but clearly the self-label had begun to take effect.

The Shift Begins

By the time I was 22, my feelings started to change. Just having returned from living in the country of Chile for 2 adventurous years, a desire within took root. I wanted to share my thoughts and experiences. I wanted to teach others what life had taught me. To do this, I knew I must confront my fears—*it was time to embrace writing*.

It was during my 20's that I wrote 2 books. The first was total drudgery. Less than a page a day

with over a solid year of writing. It was tough. It was laborious at times. Despite the difficulty though, I began to see light at the end of the tunnel.

My second book came easier. I started to learn to [write like I talked](#). No longer would I have to scrutinize every single sentence as I did before. Although I still had a long way to go, the process of putting my thoughts to pen became easier and easier with each new word.

Finally, at about the age of 31 I embraced a culture of content marketing within my [swimming pool company](#). For a solid year I wrote at least 2 posts a week. Again, things got easier and easier, and I became faster and faster. The blog literally changed the entire industry and lead me to becoming a major [thought leader](#) within my niche.

My Greatest Writing Challenge

Then came The Sales Lion in November of 2009. This new project ushered in even greater writing challenges. I was now in a field full of excellent bloggers. But I had a burning desire to build my personal brand and I knew each article that was published could literally take me to new heights.

At first articles took at least 90 minutes to write. Countless late nights were involved. The challenge was great, but so was my will to succeed.

Today, an article such as the one you're now reading, will typically take me 25-35 minutes to write. In most cases, as soon as I have a title worked out in my mind, I feel as if the article is already written. It's truly an amazing thing. No stress. No worries. Just enjoyment and inspiration.

There is a Writer in Each of Us

I mention this not to make myself sound like a smart guy, but rather to give “real” insight into the life of a “non-writer.” I cannot count the number of times I’ve heard someone tell me that they’d love to blog or embrace content marketing, but simply don’t think it’s possible because they aren’t good at, and therefore do not love, the act of writing.

To those persons, please understand that I’ve been there. Heck, we’re all there, on the same path. Personally, I know I have a long ways to go until I write magical prose with utter ease, but I can assure you that the thousands of hours I’ve now spent blogging have been worth every minute.

To close, I repeat my original question: How can you learn to love writing?

Answer: Find your passion. See yourself as a teacher. And start putting your thoughts down on that computer screen of yours.

The journey for each and every one of us along this road is a unique one. For some it may come easy. For others it will be difficult. But for everyone it will be worth it.

7 Ways You Can Learn to Write Like You Talk

I've noticed an interesting trend lately as I've been reading the mountains of blogs and blog comments on the web. For whatever reason, I hadn't picked up on this before but now that I see it, I'm beginning to realize it's a big problem for many. Simply put, here's my concern:

Most People Don't Write Like They Talk

I really began to pick up on this phenomena when I started looking at bloggers, the way they wrote their comments, and then reading their actual blog articles. What's crazy is that I have found many bloggers write *better* in their comments on other blogs than they do in their own posts. This is very interesting indeed and so the question is "Why?" What makes their comments a better read? That, my friends, is what I want to address here, and the answer is clear: ***They write comments as if they're actually talking.***

I know, sounds like too simplistic of an answer, but it's true. One of the greatest keys to writing in this age of Web 2.0 and building online relationships is by being *real*. Who are you? What's your style? What's your voice?

If people (your readers and audience) can't answer these questions, then you're in trouble. They must know you through your writings. If not, you've failed, and your brand will suffer.

So how does it happen? How can you write like you talk? Here are my thoughts.....

7 Ways You Can Learn to Write Like You Talk

1. Chill Out

That's right. Just chill. For example, when you talk to a friend, spouse, or relative do you worry about every single word? Are you worried your next sentence will be a belly-flop? Hopefully, you don't, because if you did your conversations would be as painful as P90X. So relax a little, will ya!?

2. Keep the Vernacular

When I say vernacular, I mean that although we all want to sound and appear smart, “reaching” for words can actually hurt our flow of thought and ultimately hinder words from leaving the tips of our fingers. (BTW, when I say keep the vernacular, you may want to filter a few words unsuitable for virgin ears)

3. Colloquialisms and ‘Funky’ Words are Fine

What's a funky word? Hmmm, let me see if I can draw from a few of my regulars on The Sales Lion.

Dufus

Ding-Dong

Barf

Shnikees

Wacko

Un-stinking-believable

Dude

Dang

Catch my drift? The words above are just a few “unique” terms that have been found in my past articles. But considering I write exactly as I talk, the articles just wouldn't seem “real” to me unless they were included, plus you guys wouldn't know just how goofy of a guy I am.

Another example of this is my buddy Leon in Australia. Many of you have seen him comment on here with his hilarious colloquialisms from “down unda” that always make readers smile, and without such phrases, Leon wouldn't be nearly as appealing. So although filtering and professionalism do have their place, be careful to maintain your genuine voice, got me *mate??*

4. Smile While You Write

Seriously, this tool is awesome, and a great way to gauge if you're taking yourself and your writings too seriously. Smiling means you're happy. Smiling affects your entire physiological

state. Smiling carries over into your writing and will make your words and message more vibrant to readers. My point? SMILE!

5. Tell a Story at Every Opportunity

I'm mystified how often people write without stories. It simply makes no sense to me whatsoever. When we talk to our friends, we always use stories. They're intricate. They're effective. Audiences not only perk up when a personal experience or story is told, but they are also able to turn your words into a picture much easier.

Just look back on my blog. Out of hundreds of articles on here, I'd bet less than 10 are without some personal experience or observation on my part. If you're not following this pattern, do yourself a favor and start writing about your life today as it will make the process of content production much, much easier.

6. Grammar Ain't all it's Cracked Up to Be

Look, I'll be the first to admit that proper grammar and writing style do have their place and are certainly important (especially in certain types of business), but many writers get too dang caught up in **the rules**. For example, I have this lovely habit of starting sentences with the word, "and." General grammar rules don't smile upon this, but I frankly don't care. I write like I speak, so I guess "the rules" will just have to live with it.

7. Stop Trying to Impress Everyone

Seriously, have you ever written something and worried about whether or not your "style" would impress others? If you have, ya messed up. Want to impress readers in this new age? Try honesty, sincerity, and transparency. If you simply focus on those 3 writing characteristics, you'll eventually find great success in your niche.

Is the Curse of Knowledge and Bad Vernacular Killing Your Sales and Marketing Success?

I had an amusing experience the other day that was quite symbolic of the problem so many

businesses, marketers, and salespersons are having all over the world this very minute regarding their communication.

To make a long story short, I contacted a business regarding the innovative topic of Geothermal Heating for swimming pools. I wanted to do a blog post for my pool business on this novel subject matter and asked the company if they would be interested. They said they would and this is what was sent back to me, word for word:

DX Geothermal, sometimes referred to as water less geothermal is the most efficient heating system available. The DX system uses copper tubing buried in the ground to which the systems refrigerant circulates thru. Because of this, the constant, renewable temperature of the earth being directly transferred to the system's refrigerant gives us constant and greater efficiencies that are not obtainable with traditional air sourced or water sourced heat pumps. Gas fired systems are only 80 to 90% efficient, air sourced heat pumps are about 200 % efficient provided the outdoor air temperature is high enough to draw heat from and water sourced geothermal systems approach 300% but the added cost of operating a ground water pump and the maintenance of the groundwater side detracts from this. DX heating efficiencies range between 400 to 600% and remain constant regardless of outdoor temperature and weather conditions. Another advantage is, unlike water sourced systems that require deep wells or large areas of closed loop tubing buried in the ground. We can install systems with in as little as a 12 by 12 ft. space for drilling. These systems are virtually maintenance free as there is no outdoor coil that requires annual cleaning and no water circuit on the ground end to be maintained. With a properly sized system, we can maintain the desired pool temperature year round without the use of any other source of heat. The system life is 20 to 30 years as well.

Huh?? Say What??

Ok, if you were able to make it through that without your head spinning in 400 different directions, then you're clearly much smarter than me. Now granted, maybe the nice gentleman that sent this didn't fully understand what I was asking for, but if I'm being realistic this guy is just suffering from the same communication disorder that so many business people and salespersons around the world make every day when discussing their products. This disease has become known as:

The Curse of Knowledge

I read a great excerpt on this lately from Yihong Ding over at [Semantic Focus](#) discussing this very interesting topic. The article states:

There are many examples of the Curse of Knowledge in the book Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die, written by Chip and Dan Heath. One famous example is the

experiment of “tappers” and “listeners.” A tapper heard a well-known song, such as “Happy Birthday to You” or “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and then he tapped out the rhythm to a listener by knocking on a table. After hearing the rhythm being tapped, a listener was then asked to tell the name of the song. According to the book, after repeating this experiment many times the tappers believed that the listeners should have correctly guessed at least 50% of their tapped songs. In reality, however, the listeners only guessed 2.5% songs correctly.

This is a fantastic demonstration of the Curse of Knowledge. The tappers knew the song when they were tapping (so they were like experts), while the listeners knew nothing prior to hearing the tapping (so they were like laymen). The tappers had failed to deliver what they believed to be easy to the listeners. It was the Curse of Knowledge that produced the significant gap between 50% and 2.5%. When we think that we have succeeded in explaining our knowledge, we in fact did not.

Every field, no matter what its category, has its own vernacular and “knowledge.” And the people in that field, all too often, lose touch with reality in terms of their ability to discuss their products, services, job descriptions, etc. with other people. They just naturally assume everyone else knows what the heck they are talking about, which couldn’t be further from the truth.

Computer Nerds Just Don’t Get It

This is especially true in technical fields like the Internet. My goodness, some computer nerds suffer from the curse of knowledge so much that they’ve almost reached the point of speaking a completely different language. It can be crazy in some cases.

To give you an example, I did a local search of a company that offers computer services in my area. Under the “services” section of their company website, they offer the following (again, word for word): Securing Infrastructure Research, Design, and Implement Technology to increase efficiency and security Provide repair services for current Technology on a monthly maintenance fee or incident basis Ability to offer remote support services to ensure your Infrastructure stays optimized Pre-wire new or existing business construction for current and future Technology growth Proactive System Management Standardization and Optimization of business Infrastructure Server build, support, and implementation Networking Implementation

Now I know many of you reading this will think that such phrases make plenty of sense. But for 90% of the prospects and business owners (at least in my rural area of Virginia) that browse over this website, they really won’t have a clue as to what it’s saying. In fact, I visited three more local websites in my area to find they all suffered from the exact same problem.

So my question for you here is, are you suffering from “The Curse of Knowledge”? Are you speaking and communicating to others (such as your customers) in such a way that they clearly

understand you?

Or are you making the terrible assumption that they share your knowledge, your vernacular, and your way of thinking?

Overcome and Succeed

If you can overcome this problem, I can guarantee that it will put you at the top of your field in terms of communicative abilities. So take pride in your abilities to be understood. Take pride in your simplistic, succinct, and informative writing and speech. Take pride in knowing that because you choose to explain things in a manner for all to understand that you are able to have great influence and success.

Dumb It Down, Will Ya?!!!

I had an “SEO expert” call me last week and this was his opening line: “Mr. Sheridan, do you realize your site is not optimized for many important keywords in your niche?”

As soon as I heard this question, I debated having a lot of fun with the guy and continuing the conversation, or just simply letting him be and allow my pity to quickly end the conversation.

I chose the latter but as I hung up the phone, a simple thought came to mind: “**This guy is too dumb to dumb it down.....and he’ll never make money because of it.**”

Yeah, kinda strong, but it’s true. **The Curse of Knowledge is Getting Worse**

My friend the “SEO expert” wasn’t different than most folks though. In fact, his actions represent the majority—in all industries, niches, and segments.

In the early days of my blog, when I had like 5 readers, I talked extensively about the [Curse of Knowledge](#), and how most business owners and employees use a vernacular well above their clients, thus destroying common sense communication and sales in general. And as I continue down this road of teaching and speaking about sales and marketing, I’m seeing the curse of knowledge more and more and more.

Just last week, as I was speaking to a variety of SEOs and marketers at the [Marketing Sherpa](#)

[Optimization Summit](#) , I asked the group a very simple question: “Everyone (in the world) knows what optimization is at this point, don’t they?”

As I expected, the majority of people in the room shook their head in the affirmative—another sign that most simply don’t understand their clients and prospects.

My follow up went something like this:

“Actually, NO. Most people have no clue what the word “optimization” is. In fact, 95% of all business owners still don’t know what a “keyword” is. Furthermore, most of the people in the SEO and marketing industry use a slew of “common words and phrases” that very few small businesses actually ‘get’.”

Stupid Acronyms!

And speaking of common words and phrases that most people don’t get, I’ve got to take a second to mention a second curse—**The Curse of Acronyms**.

I’ve got to tell you, in general, I hate acronyms. They stink. (except TSL of course, which is the coolest!!) They assume people have a clue when they don’t. And often times they kill good conversation and ultimately cost people (that’d be you and me) lots of money. Here are a few examples of the most commonly used: ROI (Return on Investment), ROS (Return on Sales), B2B (Business to Business), B2C (Business to Consumer), CMO (Chief Marketing Officer), CRM (Customer Relationship Management), CPC (Cost Per Click), CTR (Click Through Rate), SMBs (Small Medium Businesses).

Although I could go on and on with a list of acronyms, I’ll stop there and just say this:

If you’re utilizing acronyms all of the time in your sales, marketing, and content—you’re losing lots of money. Yeah, sure there are many people that know what they mean, but there are many more that don’t know what the heck you’re talking about— they’re just too embarrassed to admit it.

This rule obviously also applies to any other industry or trade specific words that are applied to your niche.

Our Goal is NOT to be a Genius

At the risk of sounding a bit prideful (please don't take it that way), the #1 compliment I receive regarding my speaking and writing is this:

“Marcus, you said it in such a simple way.....now I get it!”

Do I ever get accused of being a genius? Nope, but that's not the goal. The goal is that *everybody* gets what the heck it is I'm saying.

When we speak or when we write, we have a choice to make folks—We can try to impress *ourselves* or we can solely work to enlighten the *audience*. But be rest assured, the more “big words,” acronyms, and scientific stuff you say—the less you'll actually communicate a lick of value to your audience (at least in most cases).

Because I have the ability to simplify subjects, and because I try to never speak above my audience (whether it be a single client or a room of 500 people), I'm beginning to experience tremendous success in my life. As an example, I've been traveling around the country in the last few weeks to help existing [HubSpot](#) clients find success with their inbound marketing.

But do I bring any more knowledge to the table that HubSpot doesn't already do with their hundreds of awesome employees, thousands of articles, and slew of helpful videos?? Nope, not at all, but the one thing I can do pretty darn well is explain how the system works to average the Joe and Jill that have a desire but simply don't “get it.”

So that's the challenge folks—start dumbing it down and stop assuming your clients know more than they do. If you do this, I can assure you the results will be astounding.....

Baseball, Persistence, and How I Became a “Natural” Writer

Let's Play Ball

I need to tell a story. My son Joseph (aka JT) is in “coaches pitch” baseball this year. Basically, coaches pitch works like this: Kids, ages 6-9, are pitched a baseball from a machine. This machine tosses the ball at about 40 mph and consistently throws strikes down the plate. So as to keep the inning moving quickly, each child on the team gets a total of 6 swings to hit the ball. If they haven't hit the ball within 6 swings, they've struck out. Once every player has had 3 at bats,

(3 total innings), the game is over.

As you might imagine, kids this age trying to hit a little ball going 40 mph and only having 6 swings to do so often times doesn't work out too well. Heck, it's not unusual to see coaches tossing the ball (very slowly mind you) under-handed to the kids because they simply can't seem to hit the machine.

But as luck would have it this year, my son was drafted (that always makes me laugh) by a lady named Tina Moss. Along with her husband Bill, Tina takes coaching these youth very, very seriously. This was evident in the first practice of the season, where she laid out 2 simple, yet profound rules to kids and parents:

1. The team would practice twice a week, no matter what, and attendance was expected.
2. Everyone would learn to hit off the machine, and there would be no underhanded pitches during the game. (In other words, they were going to work very hard.)

Personally, when I heard Coach Tina say this, a big smile came to my face. Yep, she was going to push these kids, and she wasn't going to allow an apparent lack of "talent" or "ability" get in the way.

Of course, once I watched the results of the first practice, I was a little concerned for Tina's wishes, as there was one big problem—a lot of our players (keep in mind these are very young boys and girls, many of which have never played ball) simply had no clue. Unfortunately, talent was not going to carry this group. Wondering how Tina would react, I just sat back and allowed time to tell.

Over the next 5 weeks, my son's team practiced a total of 10 times. Rain or Shine, somehow the coaches managed to work with the players. Even more amazing, they would have "special" practices for the kids that couldn't hit well. Unlike the kids in Malcolm Gladwell's "*Outliers*," none would fall victim to a lack of attention from coaches. Simply put, Tina's will to help them succeed would overcome any deficiencies their apparent "lack of talent" might induce.

Game Day

Finally, just last week, after hours and hours of practice, my son played his first game. Watching our kids warm up, I was amazed at their smiles and confidence. It was obvious they were ready to play some ball.

The game started with the other team batting. Within no time, I realized their kids weren't well prepared. In fact, I talked to one of the parents and was told they had only had 2 practices over the previous weeks. That's right, they had 2, and we had 10.

After a quick first half of the inning which saw their kids miss ball after ball from the machine, it was our turn to hit.



Me and my boy, future Hall of Famer

With coach Tina standing on 3rd clapping and cheering her future stars on, the hours of hard work were ready to shine.....and boy did they ever.

To make a long story short, these were the actual results of our players:

24 at bats, 24 hits

And the other team? 3 hits.....total.

That's right, in a 3 inning game, all 8 players on our team hit the ball *every time*. But not only that, every hit was made **by the 3rd pitch**. Not a single child needed 6, much less 4, pitches. **3 was it**. As a father and huge sports fan, I was literally blown away by what I witnessed. Kids, who just weeks before didn't know where to stand at the plate or even how to hold the bat were now ripping balls into the outfield.

Let's Quit with the Lame "Talent" Excuses

So what's my point with all of this? Well, to be completely frank, my days are filled with businesses owners explaining to me *why* they don't have talent with the web, technology, and content marketing. If I had a dollar for every time I've heard someone tell me, "I'm just not a good writer," I'd be a rich man. **The reality is that we all stink at writing in the beginning.** In fact, and I will bet my life on this, none of us came out the womb knowing how to slap words and sentences together. Somewhere along the line, each and every one of us, little by little, had to learn it.

When I was a kid in 4th grade, I was labeled a "below average reader." They put me in a group of other "below average kids" at a separate table from the rest of the class and I was happily made fun of for being in the "remedial group."

Fact is, I couldn't read (and certainly not write) worth a lick for a long time. When my brother was 9 he could devour a comic book in 5 minutes. As for me at the same age, I just remember looking at the pictures, because the reading part of it was too tough.

Later on in life I got poor grades in English. Then in college my professor told me I couldn't write very well. Personally, I wanted to punch the guy.

So did I roll over and play dumb? Heck No. I got mad and **wasn't afraid to stink at writing**. I had stuff to say, and I knew eventually I was going to figure out how to say it on paper without sounding like an idiot.

The Making of a Writer

So two years ago I started blogging. Looking back at those articles, I can only shake my head at how poorly written so many were. Here, have a laugh like Ingrid from [NittyGriddy](#) did this week and check out this one, [my second post on TSL](#). But since that time I've written over 400 articles on my different blogs, which accounts to be somewhere around 400,000 words worth of info along with 500+ hours of sweat equity. To give you a better feel for this, most of Seth Godin's books are between 30,000-50,000 words, which is like saying I've written over 10 books during the past 2 years.

The humorous part to all of this is the fact that these days people tell me all the time I'm a "natural" writer. But much like the kids that struggled to even swing a bat their first day of practice, the road to writing has not been an easy one for me. Has it been arduous? Heck yes. Have there been ups and downs? Yes again. But has it been worth it? Well, just like the kids on my son's ball team would tell you, **yes, it surely has.**

Chapter 9: All About HubSpot

The Most Important Customer Review of HubSpot You'll Ever Read

We live in interesting times. For small businesses throughout the world, it's a time when many are realizing the need to make a change. The old stuff no longer works. Whether it's radio, TV, print, direct mail, etc.—the times have changed. These forms of outbound marketing are, more or less, dead in most industries. Inbound marketing (attracting people to your site) is the new wave, the future of the way all small businesses will think and act. But for a HUGE majority of these businesses that are the heart of the world's economy, there's a major problem—

Online Marketing and Web Design are Hard, if not Impossible, if You're Not a Tech Nerd

The direction of your company may very well lie with HubSpot....

I used to share this same problem. For 7 years I was the average pool guy running an average swimming pool construction business, attempting to fight the tide of web consumers that I was out of touch with. Even worse, I was a complete and total web dufus. Although I wanted badly to be in control of my own website and its content, my hands were completely tied. I was stuck. And I knew I'd soon go broke if I didn't make a change and get with the 21st century.

Luckily for me though, I stumbled upon a website that “grades” other websites on a scale of 1-100. Eager to see where my company's website would score, I entered our information, and out came the grand score of 17 out of 100. In that moment, [HubSpot's WebGrader](#) tool gave me a smack in the face like nothing else had done up to that point. It was the moment of truth.

It was also in that moment that I made a commitment to get out of my comfort zone and learn what it was to have a great website for my business that would surpass the needs and expectations of today's consumer. Within a half-hour of learning more about HubSpot, I knew I'd stumbled upon what I was missing—the bridge that would take a web dummy to web, or should I say “Inbound marketing,” expert.

Rocketing to the Top

Over the past 20 months I've been engulfed in following the teachings of HubSpot's system and doing everything I could to take my business to the next level. And without question, boy has it

worked. To make a long story short, [our site](#) is now one of the top swimming pool websites in the country. Its blog is nationally recognized. Organic (free) search has shot through the roof and our brand is so well known that the sales process is quicker and easier than it has ever been. *All this while trying to be a “pool guy” in a very down economy.*

So much has HubSpot changed my business and life that I now give web and marketing classes to other businesses. I’m the type of guy that believes in the law of abundance. I believe that good things need to be shared so that we can all stand at the top and share in success. This is also why I’m writing this article on my own volition as a HubSpot customer. By no means has HS (we’ll call them that for short) asked me to do this.

But as I’ve read various reviews of their product online, I’ve taken offense by certain people and companies that have talked down their product and system without really having a leg of experience to stand on and therefore make judgments. That’s what makes this review different. I’m just like you. We’re in this together.

So the following is a list of common questions and concerns I’ve seen mentioned regarding the HS system. I’ll do my best to be succinct and frank with each answer, as I feel that’s always the most effective means of communication.

Does It Work?

Does a bear poop in the woods? Oh, sorry, just had to slip that one in there. Yes it works—**for those that make it work**. In other words, there is this myth out there in the world that some webmaster guy or group can magically make your company appear on the first page of Google for just about any phrase you’d like. This is a total lie and all those guys should be imprisoned, at least in my humble opinion. The fact is establishing a strong web presence does take work and effort.

But the beauty behind HS is that they provide you with all the tools and resources necessary to do so. And when I say all, I really mean ALL—hence their all-in-one system. Whether it’s blogging, web design for dummies, video marketing, social media, analytics, etc, HS gives you the tools necessary to do very well with each—and measure your effectiveness with each while you’re at it. For anyone that says, “HubSpot doesn’t work or didn’t work for my business” I give you this rebuttal: HubSpot wasn’t the problem, you were simply too lazy to make it work for you. They gave you everything you possibly needed, but as a wise man once said:

You can take a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.

Why would I switch from my existing website to HubSpot?

Control: This is an absolute no-brainer. HS has one of the simplest content management systems I've ever seen. For those of you unfamiliar with this phrase, it's basically a system that allows "Non Techies" to design their own websites with almost no previous programming or code knowledge. Such a tool allows business owners and their employees to overcome the terrible **bottleneck** of having a webmaster and ultimately take back the keys to their web marketing vehicle. This sense of empowerment is amazing, but it's only a fraction of the HS benefit.

Analytics: HS has intensive analytics tools built in that allow you to track everything you can possibly know about your web and social media traffic. With mountains of charts, stat sheets, etc; you will be able to have a firm grasp on the best and worst pages of your website. You'll know what is generating leads and what's not. And you'll also have a clear idea of words that you rank for in the search engines and ones that you can improve on.

SEO: Search Engine Optimization, or your ability to show up on the first page of Google's (and others) search results, is a key to web marketing that cannot be ignored. Because the search engines can be hard to understand and rather fickle, HS has various tools that allow you to know the SEO strengths and weaknesses of each page on your site, therefore allowing you to make adjustments and better optimize each page, which will in-turn mean more traffic, leads, and ultimately sales.

Competitors: Do you know how good your competitor's websites are? If you don't, then you're missing out. HS not only tells you all the words/phrases your competitors rank for in search engine results, but they will also tell you about the links your competitors have coming into their sites, the grade of their site, and if they're moving forwards or backwards in terms of their web effectiveness. Simply put, this tool is incredible and a must for any business.

Awesome Lead Analysis/Tools: HS is all about getting you more leads and converting those leads into sales. This is why they've set up tremendous systems for creating lead capture forms, automated email follow-ups, and lead grading. When it comes down to it, the more you know about your leads, and the more you can nurture the leads in your sales funnel, the more sales you'll make. It's that simple and it works.

Super Simple Blogging Platform: Every, and I mean EVERY, company must have a blog if they expect search engines and consumers alike to take them seriously. HS makes it easy for your business to integrate a blog directly into its website, which in-turn enables you to build more subscribers and leverage blogging as an SEO tool. Along with the blogging platform, HS has many built-in analytics tools to help you know which blog articles are working and which ones need improvements. This tool alone made HS worth its weight in gold as it saved/made my

company thousands of \$\$\$ in increased leads and sales through great consumer education combined with a concise SEO strategy.

How Much Does It Cost and Is HubSpot Worth It?

I'm always baffled when a potential HS customer calls me as a reference and they think HS is expensive. Currently, HS has a few different “tiers” that companies can choose, but at the time of this writing, their “HubSpot Small” package goes for \$3000 per year and the “Medium” package is \$9,000. My pool company uses the medium package and I have a web coaching start up that uses their small package. What's really perplexing to me though is the fact that businesses will blow thousands a month on the Yellow Pages, or radio, or direct mail, etc—all of which have very short-term results and practically no residual—yet these same companies hesitate to spend a few thousand dollars *a year* on a system that will bring them leads, at an increasing rate, **FOREVER**.

What am I missing here? For me, spending 9k a year on what amounts to 90% of my company's advertising is utterly laughable. When it comes down to it, if companies really understand how much \$\$\$ HS will save them (assuming they do their part) then they'd be offering to pay more for the system just to get up and going tomorrow. I really mean this with all sincerity—It's worth every penny.

How Does HubSpot's CMS Compare to Others like WordPress?

Again, prepare yourself for an answer here that's not biased because I have a marketing blog on WordPress and I run two other businesses on HS. In other words, I've used both these content managers extensively and have found HubSpot to be much, much easier.

Might HS be more graphically limited? Yes, one could argue that, but for the non-techie that wants to handle 90%+ of their own web design, there is nothing better than the HSCMS. For example, I had to outsource design on my WordPress blog because I found it so difficult, yet I was able to design all 275+ pages on my swimming pool company's without the help of anyone.

And one other thing to remember—HS focuses their CMS on simplistic design because they are all about content creation and SEO. That's why, although my swimming pool website is arguably simple in design, it dominates the search engines and blows most other companies away in terms of traffic results. When it comes to Internet success, *simple*, combined with *SEO best practices* and *great content*, is the ultimate combination for success.

Should I Switch My Existing Site Over to the HubSpot CMS?

Again—no brainer. I waited to do this a few months after having signed on with HS and boy was that a dumb mistake. All it did was hinder my progress in unleashing my creative skills on the website itself. Rule of thumb—If your company has to go through a webmaster for more than 5% of your website's changes/additions, then you'd be a fool not to convert over to the HS CMS.

Who Doesn't the HubSpot System Work For?

Lazy people. Sorry, but it's the truth. If you're lazy, go spend all your money and outsource everything to a webmaster.....or better yet, go buy a \$2000 monthly ad in the Yellow Pages. (Actually, HS does offer more of this hands-on consulting on a constant basis, but such is not the focus of this article)

Will HubSpot's System Be Surpassed by other Better Systems?

A legit question, but let me just say this. Since I've been using the HS system, they've changed and added tools on a weekly basis. Some have been minor, some have been major, but the key to understand is that by no means are they a static company just resting on past success. I once visited their place at Cambridge and upon meeting their staff and CEO I realized they were **a bunch of awesomely passionate marketing and computer nerds trying their guts out to improve their system for businesses like mine and yours each and every day**. The constant developments in their system are a reflection of this and I can only imagine how many great tools the company will come up with in the future.

What Makes HubSpot Different?

When it comes down to it, I think the great difference of HS is the fact they are changing the culture of Internet/inbound marketing as we know it. They believe in teaching the masses (see [their blog](#) and self-help articles, they're amazing) as much as possible so that any man or woman, no matter their background, can be their own webmaster and SEO. They give, give, give with the hopes that businesses will understand this great paradigm shift and therefore embrace the HS way. In fact, when I think of HS, this phrase always comes to mind, as it's a perfect reflection of their business model:

Give a man a fish and feed him for a day.....Teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime.

So that's my suggestion to you. It's time to learn how to fish. It's time to change your life. If you've been considering HS and haven't pulled the trigger, then I'm here to tell you that you've wasted enough time, so let's get with it. Why delay success?? And remember this critical key:

If you just follow the HS inbound marketing system and use all their tools, you'll automatically be ahead of over 90% of the businesses in your industry who are still living in the stone-ages.

Think about that for a second. It ain't an exaggeration. Again, once you truly understand this you'll stop waffling over whether or not HS is worth it and you'll start realizing that this decision will impact your business likely more than any other decision you've made since opening its doors.

Here to Help

Look, I know you may still have some questions. I could have written all day about what I love about HS but I figured 2500 words was enough for even the most patient of readers. If you need further help, please contact me directly. My email is marcus1@thesaleslion.com and if you send me your phone number I'll call you while I'm on the road, as talking to people about marketing is always more enriching than looking at traffic jams on interstate 95 in Northern Virginia.....Seriously, I LOVE talking about this stuff and it gets me fired up just thinking about it, so buck-up and shoot me an email today.

Best of luck to you in this process. I'm excited for the change that will soon be wrought within your business.

****Important Note:** Since writing this article months ago, and because I've had so much success teaching others about HS, I'm now a HS partner. This means [I help people that are interested in signing up with HS](#) to see if it's a good fit for them or not, and if it is, they sign up through me and usually (but not always) have me mentor/coach them for the first month or so. If you're interested in finding out more about this, just call me directly on my cell phone **804-761-7924** and I'll be happy to give you my frank assessment of your company's current inbound marketing state and potential suggestions so as to properly get you started with this amazing movement **

Top 5 HubSpot Problems and Solutions

As anyone who reads my blog on a regular basis knows, my experience with HubSpot started as a "Non-Techie" business owner who was struggling to grasp web marketing in a rapidly changing, technology-based economy. Luckily though, before my business fell too far in the

tank, I was able to learn and embrace the concepts of inbound marketing while leveraging all of HubSpot's tools to create what is today the most popular swimming pool blog in the world.

Notwithstanding our successes as a company, the process of learning to utilize HubSpot (HS) was not an easy one at times, and many mistakes were therefore made along the way. That is why I eagerly wanted to write this article, as most new HubSpot customers need just a little guidance and direction when it comes to getting the most bang for your buck while using all of HS's incredible inbound marketing tools. So without further ado.....

Top 5 HubSpot Problems and Solutions

1. Poor Blogging Strategy Due to Bad Titles and Topics: I could go on and on about this one. But to make a long story short, the key to great small business blogging has to do with thinking like a consumer, not as a business owner.

What I mean by this statement is the fact that business owners and content marketers often fall short of their blogging potential simply because they don't write about topics in such a way that consumers, or search engines for that matter, care.

This is why I always tell clients to do the following: Ask yourself, "What are the top 25 questions consumers have regarding my product?" Write each one of these questions down, *exactly* as a consumer would word them. These questions are the titles of your first 25 blog articles, which equates to over 3 months worth (2 articles every week) of powerful content marketing. Now get to work, and don't deviate from the plan.

You may think this exercise seems silly or too basic, but it works. I've seen it happen over and over again. In fact, it will form the foundation of a powerful long tail keyword strategy for your company's blog and therefore benefit you for years to come.

2. Not Using/Understanding the CMS: As most people are well aware, HS has a super-simple content management system (CMS) that allows anyone, without a lick of code knowledge, to be a successful web designer. I can say this from experience because even though I'm still not code-savvy or a "programmer" today, I've designed multiple websites with the HS CMS. Unfortunately, when some people get started with HS, they simply don't take the time to "play" with the system. And when I say play, that's exactly what I mean—tinker, experiment, test.

Clients should act like they have a new iPhone and get to know all its fun little features. Because HS cares so much about their clients having success with the system, they've created an extensive training library and "boot camp" to enable you to quickly become skilled with the

system. With such tools, there's simply no excuse for someone not to become well-versed quickly with the HS CMS.

3. Don't Take Advantage of Analytics: This one is very similar to the CMS topic above, but because HS has so many analytics to look at, new clients that don't have much of a tech background can get overwhelmed and therefore dismiss all the wonderful analytics all together. Needless to say, this is a *huge mistake*. Just as with the CMS, HS has set up training videos and articles to help their clients take advantage of each and every tool that's available to them. When it comes down to it, reading analytics and understanding traffic patterns of your website needs to be a daily ritual and will play a major role in any company's inbound marketing success.

4. No Lead Capture: What's the use of having a site that gets a lot of traffic if it doesn't also generate sales? I don't know about you, but I'd choose leads and sales over traffic any day of the week. The fact is though; increased traffic should equate to more leads, which will ultimately lead to more sales. This is exactly what happened with my swimming pool company and is what has happened with any HS client we've ever had at Biz Buffs. Unfortunately though, I see HS customers all the time that only have one or two lead capture items on their *entire* site. Such actions make me slap my forehead, as I know this person is likely thinking HS and inbound marketing doesn't work when in reality they are doing it completely the wrong way.

Because HS understands the importance of lead capture, they've created multiple tools that will allow you as a client to create and insert forms, buttons, and landing pages throughout the site. In fact, as a general rule of thumb, you should have at least some type of offer/lead capture on every page of your website. When done the right way, this will inevitably increase leads and drive sales.

5. Not Enough Time: Ahhh yes, the "I'm too busy to do inbound marketing" statement. Yep, I've heard it before and every time I hear it I can only shake my head in disbelief. The reality is that if businesses and business owners really understood the importance and power of proper inbound marketing they'd never put it on the back-burner. They'd never dismiss it as something to be done "next week."

In fact, inbound marketing is so important I'll often suggest to clients (who are too busy or don't have staff available to help) that they hire someone solely for the purpose of content and video production, social media interactions, etc. Although some business owners initially balk at the idea, once they see how much money they save on advertising because of such a strong web presence they're always grateful they had the faith that inbound marketing would work if they just gave it their proper attention.

So those are your top 5 HubSpot problems and solutions. I can promise you that if you but only follow these 5 steps your HS experience will be life-changing for your business and inbound

marketing will become the core to every success within your company. I've seen such results happen over and over again for other businesses and I hope that you will soon embrace this great change for your business as well.

Have You Lost the Keys to Your Small Business?

Imagine for a second that you are a business owner and the most important part of your thriving business is your office headquarters/store. Essentially, it's the hub of your business' survival on a day to day business.....

Now I want you to imagine the unimaginable. Even though this store or office belongs to you, you do not have a set of keys to get in whenever you want. In fact, your only way of getting in is to call someone to come out and open the door for you—every time you want to enter.....Have you pictured the scene yet? Seriously, don't read on until you contemplate the lunacy of such an idea.

Now I'm sure you're thinking that I'm not making any sense here whatsoever, but the reality is that the majority of small business owners around the world currently do not hold the keys to their business. And how is this possible? Because in today's information age of marketing and Web 2.0, a company's website is the key to their entire business. It is the tool that educates customers, generates leads, and sets the tone for everything else.

A Litmus Test

Frankly put, the good or bad opinion of the majority of consumers in this new age comes almost entirely from their experience with a company's website, which is why it's unbelievable that so many business owners can't even make simple changes to their own site, much less add relative and useful content.

Just answer these questions if you'd like to take a litmus test on the control you have over your business: Could you tell me within the next 30 seconds how many visitors (customers) your website had today? If you noticed a typo in some text on your website, could you change it immediately? If you needed to make a company announcement on your site that was time sensitive, could you do so within the next few minutes? If you wanted to add an amazing photo to your website of some work your company just completed, could you show it now? And finally, if you wanted to add a video of a customer testimonial you just made (with your cool little flip camera) to the "testimonial page" on your website, could that happen right away?

If you answered "NO" to any of these questions, then I'm sorry to inform you that you have lost control of your business. I know, this may be hard for you to swallow, but let's just call a spade a spade here. The reality is that over 90% of small business owners have to contact their webmaster to do what my 6-year-old son can do with the right tools.

And even worse, these business owners not only have to often times wait days for their changes to be done but their also getting charged for such madness. OUCH.

I have major opinions regarding this subject because I, like most other small biz owners, did not have control over my business' website for many years. It was one of the most frustrating experiences I've ever had as a business owner. As I saw the relevance of my website increasing in the eyes of our consumers over these past 5 years or so, it felt like I was literally locked out of my business and helpless at times. No longer was I steering the ship. I had lost control.

There is Hope: CMS

But as I've thoroughly discussed in other blogs, even the most non web-savvy business owners and managers can now take the helm of their website with Content Management Systems like that found on the HubSpot platform (this is the CMS my business uses).

At a seminar I gave to pool and spa small biz owners this past weekend I was able to demonstrate to the entire audience just how easy one can change text, add video, and completely rearrange pages on my business' website. We also took a look at the power of analytics and learning how to truly get in the mind of our site visitors (HubSpot's analytics are unparalleled in my opinion). And frankly, for many of them it was an utterly mind-blowing and eye opening experience.

Multiple, multiple people came up to me after the show and expressed their pure excitement to know that they could now "get the keys back to their store." And what's interesting, most of these same people never realized just how simple and easy web design could be until this event.

Their excitement is was stimulated this post and my only hope is that the participants will now make the small investment it takes to get on board with a CMS company like HubSpot. Personally, my business spends about \$6,000 a year for everything we get from HS and I'd honestly be happy to pay 3 times that much if I had to.

Make the Change.....NOW

But this is really not about HubSpot, as my core point is that if you've lost control of your business and if you no longer have the keys to your store then it's time to do something about it. Make the necessary changes. Start researching which CMS works best for you and your business and don't make excuses about a few hundred bucks a month, as I can promise you that it's costing you way more than that because of the fact that you do not have control of your company's web and marketing presence.

I know it sounds cliché, but if I was able to overcome my “web ineptitudes,” then I know you can to. And as I’ve mentioned before, I’m always here to help you on the path, so don’t hesitate to email me your questions or thoughts.

7 Keys to Remember When Starting with HubSpot

1. Don’t Wait to Start Using the CMS

For some dumb reason, when I signed up with HubSpot I only used their Content Management System for our company blog, and *not* for the rest of the website. So although I was getting tremendous value from their analytics and the SEO the blogging was bringing my way, I was still hand-cuffed in terms of designing our website. In hindsight, I was simply afraid that if I converted my site to the HubSpot CMS, I’d be married to the company forever. Also, I think I still lacked the belief that I could actually be my own web designer.

Luckily though, with the help of a few great HubSpot employees, I finally “saw the light” and went “all in” with a complete website conversion. What’s crazy is that I waited 6 entire months from the time I started with HubSpot before I made this move. But as soon as the conversion was made, and I realized just how easy it was to manipulate and design my site’s pages, my creative energies and juices ran wild. I literally felt like a new business owner and frankly I feel like a big dummy for not making the change from the get-go. But as they say, it’s better late than never.

Note*:** Because of its design limitations, the HubSpot CMS may not be a great fit for every company, especially existing sites with special code, graphics, design, etc.

2. Attend Bootcamp and Watch the Training Videos!!

I’m not sure what it is about men and directions, but we’re all apparently born with this thing that prevents us from making life much easier and actually reading the directions versus doing things the hard way. Such was the case when I started blogging and using the CMS. Although I was doing quite a few things OK, I was missing out on many skills and features because I hadn’t taken the time to learn about all the awesome analytic tools that were available to me.

This is why I strongly urge everyone starting with HubSpot to not just lean on your initial consultant to learn the system, but rather utilize their incredible training articles and videos so as to establish your base and then use the consultant to clarify any confusing points. Remember, the goal here is **self-reliance**.

3. Embrace Blogging

I’ve talked about this a ton but it’s still a huge mistake I see with HubSpot clients I now consult

with. Nothing has changed my company, as well as my life, like blogging has. The organic (free) traffic that we receive to our site on a daily basis is mindboggling compared to what it was 2 years ago. Looking back, I only wish I had been a little more consistent with my blogging early on, as well as a little more clean with the look of each blog.

For example, my first blog articles were very plain—no photos, bullets, embedded videos, etc. But once I started blogging at least twice a week, as well as worked on the general “look” of each article, the traffic and subscribers increased drastically in volume.

4. Utilize Forms/Landing Pages

As you likely already know, HubSpot makes it really, really easy to create lead-capture forms for your website. For some dumb reason, I waited months to utilize these great forms. Notwithstanding, today my site has some type of lead capture on almost every page and the amount of leads we have in our system today versus what we had a year ago is staggering.

5. Lead Nurturing is Awesome

Going hand-in-hand with great lead capture forms, HubSpot’s automated lead nurturing system makes the life of a business owner and marketer much, much easier. For example, my swimming pool company sends out a free DVD to customers who fill out a form on our webpage, and without me doing anything, the lead will receive a nice follow-up letter 5 days later asking them what they thought of the DVD.

This tool has been a tremendous asset in preventing any customers that for whatever reason did not receive a DVD to be able to notify us instead of thinking we’ve forgotten about them. It also has lessened the amount of time-consuming email follow-ups we have to do with our lead base.

6. Throw Yourself into Analytics/Sources/Keywords and the Rest of Your Dashboard

HubSpot has some of the greatest analytic tools in the world on their “dashboard.” These analytics let you know amazing things about your customers, but the key is that you actually take the time to become familiar with the dashboard, especially these analytic features. I’m always amazed at how many HubSpot users I talk to that aren’t even using *half* of the awesome tools available to them with the system. Here’s a general rule of thumb: **You should get to know the HS dashboard like the back of your hand.** (And no, I’m not kidding.)

7. Be Patient!!

Rome wasn’t built in a day, and nor will your ability to understand HubSpot. Don’t put too much pressure on yourself, and certainly don’t get overwhelmed. If you’re patient but hard working and determined, little by little each day will get easier and easier.

4 Reasons Why Internet Cookies Will Rock Your Business' World

Cookies.....Mmmmmm.....Just the thought of them gets my salivary glands working. And no, I'm not talking about the ones Grandma used to make. I'm talking about the Internet kind. And trust me when I say that these cookies, if you try 'em, will be the best you've ever had.

What the Heck is an Internet Cookie?

But before we go into the reasons why Internet cookies are the greatest thing since sliced bread, let see how our friends over there at [Wisegeek](#) define these “sweet” marketing tools:

A computer cookie is a small text file which contains a unique ID tag, placed on your computer by a website. The website saves a complimentary file with a matching ID tag. In this file various information can be stored, from pages visited on the site, to information voluntarily given to the site. When you revisit the site days or weeks later, the site can recognize you by matching the cookie on your computer with the counterpart in its database.

So for those of you that are new to this term, did you get all that?? Well, if you didn't, just look at it this way. Every computer, just as a vehicle has a license plate, has its own address. This address is referred to as an IP address, or Internet Protocol address, and is a numerical label assigned to just about every computer on the web. The beauty behind cookies is that it knows when your car (computer) and license plate (IP address) have entered the building (website).

In fact, because your address is recorded and always being monitored, cookies enable a website to “follow” you wherever you go while you're on their site. As you can imagine, knowing where your customers have been on your website, the pages they've viewed, how long they spent on each one, and how many times they've come back, is an extremely powerful sales and marketing tool.

It Starts with Lead Capture

But before we cover just what cookies can do for you, understand that the only way cookies even

work in the first place is if a visitor to your site fills out a form. This part is key. When a customer fills out a form, cookies are then attached to the IP address and at that point the benefits begin.

And one other point—Many people turn the cookies to their computer off, therefore disabling others to track their actions when visiting that site. Notwithstanding, many others allow cookies and its benefits to you as a business owner and marketer are incredible. So let's check out what this awesome tool can do for you and your business.

4 Reasons Why Cookies Are Stinking Awesome

They can tell you how the visitor found you: Lead tracking is an essential component of any marketing plan, and it's imperative that we're able to track how our customers are finding our site. Did they arrive via Pay Per Click? Was it an organic search? Maybe a referral from another website? Either way, as we see how customers are finding our site we are then able to focus more attention on that area and have more direction with our web marketing focus.

They can tell you how many, and what pages, a lead has viewed: In this information age, an informed consumer will make or break a sale for a business every time. For example, my company's website has about 250 pages. And after looking at lead activity for about a year now, I've come up with the following ratings system:

1-5 Pages Viewed: Likely not very serious and maybe misinformed. Good chance this person is not yet in the "buying" phase.

6-10 Pages Viewed: Luke-warm shopper. Still has not spent nearly enough time to become informed and educated, but showing signs of hope. Will need quite a bit of teaching if/when we meet for a sales appointment.

11-20 Pages Viewed: Relatively serious shopper. This person has taken a decent amount of time to become informed regarding our company and products, and therefore has a solid foundation. Still could use quite a bit of knowledge and teaching though.

21-50 Pages Viewed: Serious Shopper. Very informed. Looking to make a decision, likely soon.

50+ Pages Viewed: Red Hot Lead. This person knows just about everything there is to know about me, my company, and my product. Not only is this person going to buy, but it appears they're already sold on us.

Now you may be thinking it's not a good idea to judge a lead before you actually meet them, but I'm here to tell you that if you follow customer patterns long enough, including the type and number of pages viewed, you will be able to thin slice quickly just how serious they are about buying, their hot buttons, and their overall product/company knowledge in general. Although I always keep an open mind when meeting with a prospect the first time, the numbers almost never lie.

3. Number of Site Visits: Who do you think is more ready to buy—Someone who has only visited your company's website once or someone who has visited your site 4 times in the last 48 hours? I'm sure we'd both agree that you'd choose the latter, which only makes sense because that person is obviously thinking quite a bit about your product and appears to clearly be in a "buying" mode.

4. Visit Notification: Holy Cow, this is one of the coolest tools ever. Imagine that you recently gave a client, we'll call him Jeff Jones, a quote and upon following up with Jeff, you leave him a message only to receive no response. Undeterred, you try calling him a second time but again receive no call back. By this point, you dejectedly give up hope that Jeff is interested and decide to file his information and quote away. But two days later, out of the blue, you get a notification on your blackberry that says, "Jeff Jones is visiting your website." With a new-found hope, you call Jeff and this is how the conversation goes:

You: Hello Jeff, it's Marcus Sheridan (Cool name!), how are you?

Jeff: Marcus, hello, I'm so glad you called me. You're not going to believe this but I just got off your site!

You: (w/ a big smile in your voice) No way! Well I guess it was meant to be then, huh Jeff?

Jeff: Wow, I guess so. But I'm glad you called.....

I've literally had a conversation similar to this one countless times with clients of mine. I'll give up on them and then, out of the blue, I see they're visiting my website. And as soon as their name comes across my blackberry, you better believe I call them that second. Can you imagine the power of such a tool?!!

The following is an actual lead from my website. Take a look at this person's stats and then we'll talk about what it all means:

Activity Summary Most recent visit 1 hour ago, 11 visits since March 22, Average of 25 page views per visit, 275 total page views, 81 unique pages viewed, 1 form submitted, Found site via Google Search for: Virginia Fiberglass Pools, Better than 99% of Leads

Now tell me, just by looking at these stats, what type of customer do you think this person is?

Yep, you guessed right, this customer is **AWESOME**. Which is why she was one of the easiest sales I've ever made. The person was so well informed, and had gone over so much of our website, that by the time I met with her she was basically completing my sentences. She literally knew everything about me, my company, and my products. No doubt, she was a dream customer, *but I knew this even before our first visit.*

HubSpot and Cookies

Although I could literally talk about the power of cookies for your business all night long, I'll close with one last point. As many of you already know, the analytics I use with my website, as well as all the forms I utilize with their corresponding cookies, are just another benefit of using [HubSpot](#). This simple HS feature has made me thousands and thousands of dollars over the past year that I would clearly not have made had I not been using all the powerful tools that come with the HubSpot content management system.

The reason why I toot HubSpot's horn so much is not because I'm a paid employee of theirs, but rather because my time with them has altered my life in profoundly positive ways and completely revolutionized the marketing 2.0 strategies we utilize as a business.

Don't Delay Another Day

But whether you plan on using HubSpot or not for your website, make sure as soon as you're done reading this article that you find a way, if you're not already doing so, to implement cookies into your business' marketing plan. Sadly, the few words I've written about the power of cookies here on this post in no way do the topic justice, but hopefully it's a start for anyone previously unaware of this powerful tool. You now have the knowledge, so don't hesitate to make it work for you!

Note***To read lots of technical jargon regarding cookies (or if you thought my explanation stunk), check out what [How Stuff Works](#) had to say.

5 Reasons Why You Should Fire Your Webmaster Today

If you needed to make a change with your business' website, could you make it this second?

Do you ever find yourself **frustrated** that you have to run everything through your webmaster just to add the simplest of ideas?

I pose these questions because they relate to a small business owner I was speaking with yesterday on the phone. This gentleman understood what so many of his fellow business owners do not—the utter importance of being able to control your own website. The only problem was that he had no idea how to accomplish such a task.

While talking with this man, it brought me back to the days of “no control.” As I’ve mentioned in [other posts](#), over the past couple of years I’ve been on a quest to go from a “Tech Dummy” to “Tech Master.” And although I’m certainly not at the “Master” level yet, I have been in complete control of my company’s website for a long time now. Every one of the hundreds of pages were created by me. But such was clearly not always the case.

It became pretty obvious to me about 2 years ago that all the future marketing success of my business would be contingent on our website. There were days when I’d go to the office and look at the site and say, “Gosh, I can’t stand the wording on this page, I wish I could change it right now.” Or “Oh my goodness, I can’t believe I have a typo on such an important page, I hope my webmaster can get to it soon to change it.” Or “If only I knew how to add pictures to this page.....then I could really create something visually awesome for our visitors.”

I literally had thousands of such thoughts. But I was handcuffed by my own lack of knowledge, limited by an invisible monster (web site design) that bothered me each and every day. *If I only had the knowledge of my webmaster.....*

Wikipedia defines a webmaster as follows:

A webmaster (portmanteau of web and postmaster), also called a web architect, web developer, site author, website administrator, or (informally) webmeister, is a person responsible for maintaining a website(s). The duties of the webmaster may include ensuring that the web servers, hardware and software are operating accurately, designing the website, generating and revising web pages, replying to user comments, and examining traffic through the site.

Sound daunting? It need not be.

A little over a year ago, I spent quite a bit of time trying to learn Dreamweaver. I got to the point of doing the very basics, but I was still incredibly hampered and frustrated, constantly handing off responsibilities to my webmaster.

But as I've talked about heavily in other posts, CMS entered my life through an awesome company called [HubSpot](#). CMS stands for Content Management System and this technology (provided by many companies) now allows small business owners just like me to finally "take the wheel" and drive their company's marketing into the homes of the 21st century consumer without bonds and limitations. CMS will change small business marketing as we know it and for that, I couldn't be any more grateful.

But let's get to the point of the article—*Why should you, as a small business owner, fire your webmaster and move to a CMS system?*

1. Let Your Imagination Run Wild

It's one thing to look at your company's website and say, "I think we should change this, let's see what my webmaster says." versus "Wow, this page really is dull. It's time I give it a change. Here we go....."

Do you see the difference between the two? It's hard to put into words just how much the "creative juices" get pumping when you know you're the man. You're the designer. You're the artist behind the paint and the architect behind the edifice. Once this change occurs and you are able to experience creativity by letting your mind freely dictate the image your business portrays, you'll never want to release the reins again.

2. Money, Money, Money

I had an unusual case with my business' webmaster. Not only was he a great guy but he was very inexpensive. Such cases are rare because webmasters normally charge by the hour, and often times the hourly rate is \$100 or more. As you can imagine, such financial burdens can greatly hinder a business owner's desire to send for changes to the web master. Although the initial move of converting over to a CMS may cost a little bit of money, the financial savings are immeasurable. In fact, since taking the reins myself, I've probably logged about 200 hours of changes and programming to my company's website. I'll let you do the math on that one.....

3. Real Time Change

Every business owner needs to be able to change his/her website at the drop of a hat. Whether it's to correct a typo, make an announcement, or upload a brand new video, real-time change is a must in this highly technical and information driven world. The last thing any business owner wants is the inability to add something of major importance to their website *"until their web guy*

gets back from vacation.”

4. Personal Touch

No matter how much input a business owner has with his webmaster, the website will likely not have his “stamp” and personal touch. It’s essentially impossible, which really stinks, because that “touch” is what customers and prospects need to feel when they’re on the site. Why business owners create a business ground up, shaping its every move, only to let it all go with their website is baffling to me. Without a doubt, I can now say that my company’s website is absolutely symbolic of me and my two business partners.

5. SEO

This particular topic would require a quite a few pages to give it proper justice, but let me just say this—A large portion of webmasters and website designers for small businesses do not understand SEO. Yes, I know this statement will make a lot of web guys upset but it’s just the reality. Webmasters are often times much too artistic and ‘flash’ oriented.

This means that although they may be able to design “pretty websites,” Google thinks they’re “**pretty ugly**.” In other words, the search engines don’t like them and therefore the website gets no SEO love. And as I’ve mentioned many times before, it’s imperative that your small business website is on board the SEO train. This is why remarkable, quality content should always supersede web page pomp and circumstance.

So there are 5 reasons (out of about 100) why you should take the helm of your company’s website. And will you ever need the services again of a webmaster? Yes, you very well may. In fact, I suggest that you utilize a “mentor” until you’re off and running. Most CMS companies have such mentors to help lay the initial foundation. But the beauty of a mentor vs. a webmaster, in many cases, is that mentors want to create independency whereas a webmaster will oftentimes create dependency. In other words, **mentors want you to move on**. It can be tough love but that’s exactly what all business owners need when it comes to understanding the basics of web design.

HubSpot Tipping Point App

As I’ve stated in articles on TSL, Content is the Greatest Sales Tool in the world today. You see, many people understand how content (blogs and such) can bring new visitors to your site and help them enter “the top of the funnel,” but most don’t conceptualize the power of that same content to literally “push” leads down that funnel, ultimately become a “customer.”

It is for this reason that I developed for all my fellow inbound marketers what I call the “**Tipping**

Point” App.

The story behind this app is simple. After 2010, I took a look at my HubSpot analytics and compared all my leads vs. customers that year. Upon doing this, I realized my customers essentially had one “magic number” that lead to their buying decision: **Page Views**. In fact, I found that if a customer read about 30 pages of my website, the closing rates for sales appointments was around 80%, a drastically high number for the swimming pool industry.

Once I understood that 30 page views was a “tipping point,” my entire content campaign was built around helping my leads reach the magical number. As you might imagine, this had a major impact on my company and bottom line.

Over the last year, I’ve been teaching folks about tipping points and content all over the country, and the results have been obvious—**In every industry and niche, and with every product or service, there is a tipping point, especially when it comes to page views.**

So that’s what this app does. It tells you, as a HubSpot customer, the difference from your leads to your actual customers in terms of page views (Keep in mind, this app won’t work unless you’re marking your leads as “closed” in HubSpot). Once you starting looking at the data, you’ll quickly learn what your customer tipping points are and be able to plan your content marketing strategy around this simple yet business-changing reality.

Oh, and did I mention the app is **FREE in the HubSpot App Marketplace**? Yep, free. My gift to fellow HubSpotters because ya’ll rock!!

Why the Inbound vs. Content Marketing Debate is Stupid, and What Gives HubSpot??

I’m really not up for mincing words on this subject today so let me just be blunt: **HubSpot once posted the worst article I’ve ever seen on the subject of content marketing.**

Feel free to read the [entire article](#) if you’d like, but here are its 5 main points, verbatim:

- 1.) Content marketers care too much about traffic.**
- 2.) Content marketers think great content will naturally rise to the top of search engines.**
- 3.) Content marketers think great content will go viral.**

4.) Content marketers can't get butts in the seats.

5.) Content marketers are missing the big picture.

A Train Wreck of Gross Inaccuracy

If there is one thing in this world that drives me nuts is ignorant blanket statements.

Not only did this article have 1 blanket statement, but it had 5.

Even worse, the 5 were terrible. A literal train wreck of gross inaccuracy.

Some of you right now may be very surprised to hear me say these things. Over the last two years, few have supported the [HubSpot and inbound marketing](#) movement as much as I have.

In fact, I usually answer at least 1-5 HubSpot related emails and phone calls every single day from folks who are considering the product, the large majority of which just need an extra “push.”

So that's what I do, I help them understand and catch the vision, with no thought of reward. At the risk of sounding cheesy, it's a true labor of love for me.

Where's the Response?

But this is also exactly why I'm so unhappy about seeing such a negative post about a positive subject. Heck, not only was it poorly written but at last check **the person that wrote it didn't even answer comments at the bottom.**

Seriously? Are you kidding me HubSpot? You write a post that goes after an entire wing of your own industry (that's right, we're all in the same boat) and you (the post author) don't even join the conversation?

Talk about poor blogging practices, c'mon fellas!

For those of you unaware of their history, the phrases “inbound marketing” and “content marketing” are less than 10 years old each. The founders of HubSpot were the first to use IM,

and the good people of **Junta 42** and the **Content Marketing Institute** were the first to commonly use the phrase “content marketing.”

Up until this point, no stone has really been cast from one side to the other, as the two groups have worked incredibly well together to promote two movements that are very, very similar—sharing just about all major core principles (at least how I see it).

The Debate Ensues

This is why, when the HubSpot post was published, the folks at CMI responded accordingly and with passion.

In the comments section of the post, [Robert Rose](#) from CMI said:

..... let me re-title your post for you..... It should read “Confessions of a *Bad* Content Marketer.” Because, if this is really what you think content marketing is – then it’s clear that you don’t really understand the scope and purpose of content marketing as a practice.

Certainly there are overlaps at the top of the funnel between IM and CM – but CM goes well beyond lead generation, and into lead nurturing, customer retention, up sell, customer service and areas that Inbound Marketing just doesn’t cover. To draw it into your metaphor – it sounds to me like you were a “Sunday content marketer” only going to church on holidays and barely mouthing the words of the hymnal. You should spend the time to learn the depths of CM – you may be surprised at how much salvation there actually is. I’d suggest a couple of “good books” (sorry couldn’t resist that one) on the topic – but that would be self-serving.

[Kip Bodnar](#) of HubSpot then responded with this:

Robert,

I would argue that we shouldn’t be arguing. What you described in your comment is inbound marketing. Inbound marketing DOES include lead nurturing, customer retention, upsell, customer service as well as marketing analytics and sales and marketing alignment that is often forgotten in content marketing.

What you are telling me is that you are an inbound marketer, not a content marketer.

To which Rose fired off:

@Kipp.....

Wait what? Is then Corey is a failed inbound marketer? Because if the two are equal then.....
Okay, now you have me really confused.....

No..... In the post Corey describes content marketing as a “subset of inbound marketing”.....
And inbound marketing working toward customer retention and service is a new one for me.....
HubSpot’s own vision says it is focused on: “get found by more prospects shopping in their niche, convert a higher percentage of prospects into customers and analyze the results to figure out what works for their target audience.”

Maybe I’m wrong – and maybe in your opinion inbound marketing **ALSO** covers these areas – but I certainly don’t see it.....

But, really to draw a distinction between the two and imply that one is “more comprehensive” than another – and then to say that both are synonymous is just confusing.

A day later, **Joe Pulizzi** of Junta42 and CMI responded with [an incredible piece](#) as well, maybe the best pillar article I’ve ever seen on the subject of **Content Marketing**, and the rest of his thoughts on this inbound vs. content marketing debate.

Semantics are Stupid

But even still, I don’t like what I’m seeing. Why?

I don’t believe our problem in the world of business and marketing is silly semantics. I also don’t believe the debate of “which is a subset of the other” (inbound or content) means squat either.

The only thing I care about is that the 99% of the world who are **NOT** currently embracing inbound, content, social media, new age, education-based, call-it-what-you-want marketing eventually get on board with the greatest business movement that we’ve seen on this planet for decades.

Does anyone here actually think Joe Business Owner, who’s currently struggling to pay his

employees and keep the lights on cares about semantic subsets and frivolous definitions of a couple of terms that are already very, very foreign??

We Don't Own Any of this Stuff

And while I'm at it, let me also point out that HubSpot doesn't own the phrase inbound marketing. CMI doesn't own the phrase content marketing.

I don't own the phrase ["content tipping points."](#)

Or ["assignment selling."](#)

Or ["The Law of Compound Information."](#)

Or any other phrase that I've dubbed since attempting to contribute to this wonderful movement.

If you think content marketing falls under inbound, then fine, **run with it.**

If you think inbound marketing falls under content, then fine, **run with it.**

I don't care what you believe just as long as your goal is to embrace the mountain of new principles we've all been hearing, learning about, and experimenting with over the past few years.

Why Does Man Screw Up Great Stuff??

It's a sad thing to me that man has always found a way to divide truth and principles and thus form different groups that really should have the same goal. (Reformation ring a bell anyone?)

Is debate healthy at times? Yes, of course it is. Passion is wonderful too, which is why I completely empathize with Robert and Joe for defending the content marketing position. I likely would have done the same.

But the fact is both types of marketing are going to be "under development" for **the rest of time.** Certain parts and practices will be added while others will be deemed obsolete or ineffective.

This is why definitions, classifications, and the rest of this debate won't ultimately serve the masses.

Will it gives guys like me, Robert Rose, Joe Pulizzi, [David Meerman Scott](#), [Ann Handley](#), [CC Chapman](#), [Mike Volpe](#), [Brian Halligan](#) and many others something to talk and write about?

Yeah, maybe so, but I say we instead **turn the tide**. I say why not focus all our efforts into building the two movements up, thus benefiting *all* parties involved.

And finally, just for the record, **I deeply care about both of the organizations in this post**. HubSpot and inbound marketing have changed my life. The folks at CMI are utterly amazing and visionary. I plan on working with them both for years to come. And that's exactly why it's my hope that this was an anomaly, and not a preview of things to come.

The Biggest Problem with HubSpot in 2012 and Beyond

As you are no doubt aware of by now, I'm a passionate fan of [HubSpot](#). The Boston-based company and all-in-one social media platform gave me the tools and information I needed in 2009 to save my swimming pool company and turn our website into the #1 trafficked site of its kind in the entire world.

After experiencing so much success with the system, about 10 months ago I became the first customer in a non-tech field to become a **HubSpot partner**, or "VAR" (value added reseller). This essentially means that businesses who are interested in HubSpot [sign up to the system under me](#) and I help them through the process of boarding on this new platform, which includes teaching them to use and understand all of the HubSpot tools but also catch the vision that is Inbound Marketing and carry out a plan that will catapult their business and brand to new heights.

Today, as one of the largest HubSpot partners in the world (in terms of clients), as well as the fact that so many existing HubSpot users email me regularly because of this blog and this free eBook, I've been reminded day in and day out of the one great problem HubSpot is facing in from now and into the future.

A Company of Extreme Growth

But before I discuss what this problem is, I want to do a brief overview of HubSpot's history,

which in many ways coincides perfectly with the theme I'm presenting here.

You see, when I started with HubSpot in 2009, they still had less than 1000 customers. (Today they have several thousand.) They also had one main blog, which was updated once, maybe twice a day.

The core to their system was: A simple CMS/blog platform (content management system)

Keyword/SEO tools

Lead tracking/nurturing tools

For me, as a new HubSpot user and total tech dummy, this was perfect. It enabled me to focus on the same key elements of inbound marketing and analyze the same tools day in and day out.

But fast forward to today, weeks before the start of 2012. Google has dumped [tons of money](#) into the HubSpot movement. Other investors have thrown their hats in the ring as well. They've been named the 2nd Fastest Growing Software Company by Inc. Magazine.

The list of accolades could go on and on, but the movement has made everyone in the social media industry pay close attention.

What's interesting though, if you look at HubSpot's core system today, their features include (to name a few):

A more advanced CMS Improved Keyword/SEO tools

More in-depth lead tracking/nurturing tools (especially with the acquirement of Performable)

Landing Page creation and Advance A/B split testing

Advanced Marketing Automation/Email

A robust App Marketplace

And much more

Many people will look at all of these new and improved features by HubSpot and give it a huge “thumbs up,” as well they should.

During my time with the company, it has been obvious that HubSpot is the opposite of a static company. They are constantly developing, improving, adding features, etc. The list above will likely be a spec of the platform’s core features a few years from now.

Notwithstanding all of this, **there is also a dark side to such growth and improvement.**

Yes, most people in my position wouldn’t talk about this subject, but then again, I’m not most people. Fact is, HubSpot has a unique problem on its hands:

The Curse of TMI

That’s right, *too much information*. This is HubSpot’s biggest problem going forward. Why? Think about this for a second:

Pretend you fall into the 95% of HubSpot customers who are small to medium sized business owners with very limited knowledge as to how the web works. The phrase “social media” is intimidating to you. The idea of “inbound marketing” is very attractive, but the thought of “blogging” and “producing content” makes you a little (or a lot) nervous.

This being said, you start to learn from HubSpot and something happens:

You’re getting hit with multiple blog posts a day telling you what you need to be doing.

You feel like you need to be good at Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc.

You feel pressured to write blog post upon blog post.

You feel pressured to create landing pages, call-to-action buttons, and lead capture forms.

You understand the need for continual education and staying up to date with the industry

You want to keep up with and learn about HubSpot's newest tools, features, etc.

And on and on and on and on.

Catch what I'm saying here folks?

When I say there exists a "Curse of TMI," I'm not kidding.

On an average day, I'll receive 5-10 personal emails from HubSpotters and Inbound Marketers stating:

"OK, I've just signed up with HubSpot, but now what??!"

"Marcus, I know I should be blogging, but where do I start??"

"I'm so confused with all I've been reading and feel like I'm getting pulled in 10 different directions."

"I know all that I've been seeing and reading is important but I just need to know what my priorities are!"

These are actual statements I received last week alone, and as you might imagine, there are many, many more.

Now is this HubSpot's fault? Are they falling short?

Some might answer "Yes" to this, and others will answer "No."

Personally, I think there is a little bit of both going on.

Paralysis By Analysis

Look, over the last couple of years, no one has given more free information to the public about social media and inbound marketing than HubSpot. This act deserves major applause and

appreciation from all of us.

But, because humans have a natural tendency to lose focus so easily, all of this information can act as a curse, as it can induce a “**paralysis by analysis**” from users.

With 100 items on their “inbound marketing to-do list,” HubSpotters and inbound marketers often times feel overwhelmed and the starting point, at least in their minds, simply isn’t there.

Don’t get me wrong here folks. I believe what HubSpot is doing is a major service for all of us. The fact that they put their money where their mouth is and have become the leading “teachers” of this marketing movement is unbelievable.

And trust me when I say **they do not want their customers to fail**. More than ever, HubSpot is offering continuing education and training for their users. They’re producing tutorials on a weekly basis. They’re offering more 1-on-1 consulting than ever before.

Notwithstanding all of these actions though, they need to do a better job of addressing this TMI issue. They need to find a more clear and concise way of helping clients and users catch a clear “**starting point vision**” with the product and within bound marketing in general. If they achieve this act, the difference it will make for their user experience will be monumental.

The One Thing HubSpot Cannot Change

Despite all of this though, many users will fail with HubSpot and Inbound Marketing because of laziness and lack of effort. I’ve seen it at times with my own clients and I’ve seen it with Hubspotters that have come to me for help. In fact, **I’ve never talked with someone who “failed with HubSpot” where it wasn’t their fault.**

Simply put, all the information in the world will not overcome lazy and unmotivated people, and HubSpot will never change this.

Like the old saying goes, “**You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.**”

How to Sign Up with HubSpot

So you’re interested in possibly signing up for HubSpot, are you? That’s great, but it’s important

to understand the following:

HubSpot is just a tool, and **only as good as the person using it.**

HubSpot and inbound marketing **will not work overnight.** (Usually great results are seen between the 3-12 month time period)

HubSpot and inbound marketing **require time.** (I tell everyone, the first 2 months require about 10 hours of dedication a week, and then goes down with time.)

HubSpot and inbound marketing are a **culture.** To have success, you must stay at it and be consistent.

HubSpot is amazing, but it's NOT a magic pill.

Signing Up with HubSpot Underneath Me

As most folks know, because I had so much success with my swimming pool company and HubSpot, **I now teach other businesses how to replicate that success.** Coming from the side of the “average Joe business owner,” **I am able to speak the language of my clients and show them exactly what they have to do to start the inbound marketing race running.**

As a HubSpot partner, many clients sign up underneath me. Typically, we'll do a “boarding” or training to get the client up and running, and once they feel self-empowered and able to fly, I “push them out the nest.” This means my **clients aren't paying a large retainer to me every month because their training is such that it enables them to powerfully take control of their own inbound marketing destiny** with the right plan, vision, and support.

The cost of signing up with HubSpot underneath me as opposed with going to HubSpot directly means that you will spend **the exact same amount of money for the package.** But, because I do make a commission off of anyone that signs up with HubSpot underneath me, I also offer a FREE 1 hour, 1 on 1 coaching session to anyone that signs up. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, I do offer a 6-week training course that empowers folks to take charge of their HubSpot and Inbound Marketing, which is nothing like anything offered in the entire industry.

If you're interested in HubSpot and would like to sign up and also receive your FREE consulting, please email me at marcus1@thesaleslion.com and I'll contact you immediately.

Chapter 10: Other Advertising Mediums

Why Shotgun and Outbound Marketing are Dead...and What You Can Do About It.

Have you ever made some really, really dumb mistakes with your business' marketing plan? I think we all have. Especially those of us that are living the life of owning a small business and trying to do whatever it takes in a difficult economy to gather leads and garner sales.

An Example of What *Not* to Do

I'm certainly no exception to the rule when it comes to marketing blunders. When I started my business 9 years ago with my two partners we literally knew nothing about advertising and marketing. I had never taken a single course on the subject in college, read an article online, nothing.....Not a great foundation, wouldn't you say?

Because our business was that of installing swimming pools and hot tubs, we just figured we'd dab a little here and there and find out what medium would work the best.....How about that for a plan?

As I've said before, this blog is all about helping other small businesses and sales/marketing professionals to not repeat the dumb mistakes that I've managed to make owning a business. In terms of my all-time biggest-dummy mistakes, our initial advertising/marketing plan is likely in the top 5 (In a list of about 1000).

So what was our marketing methodology for the first five years of the business? Here's a little glimpse in to my head during those years:

Radio advertiser shows up.....hmmm, everyone is doing radio.....it can brand us if we do it long enough.....we need the sales.....Let's give it a try!

TV advertiser shows up.....wow, cable TV advertising would be awesome for our visual product.....it's expensive.....but TV is the future.....A 6-month contract??.....Oh well, here we go!!

Magazine advertiser shows up.....sure looks like a nice product.....and everybody reads this magazine.....yikes, a 6-month commitment.....but it goes directly to our target audience.....we need the sales..Let's give it a try!

Direct Mail guy comes by.....holy cow, 50,000 homes in our target income!.....boy is it expensive.....but our customers love these little cards.....3-month minimum.....Here we go again!

Phonebook guy struts in the office.....everyone uses the phonebook.....the bigger the ad the better.....my goodness these ads are expensive.....but everyone uses the phonebook.....geez, we'll need to be in 5 books just to reach our entire audience.....but everyone uses the phonebook.....12-month commitment at that price?? Yikes.....but everyone uses the phonebook.....Ok, we'll take the big ad.

And so, for the first 5 years of our business, such was our advertising plan. Literally, it was **shotgun marketing at its finest**. No rhyme, no reason, just making decisions by the seat of our pants and as the sales guy walked in the door.

And what was the end result? Well all those little small bills added up to be one massive financial pain in our you-know-what . In fact, there was simply no way to keep up with it all. We were in the vicious cycle of needing leads, needing sales, having no direction or plan, and **spending way too much freaking money**.....Ouch.

But like anything that is thrown in the fire and either forced to burn to death or do something about it, we chose to do something about it. We chose to get with the 21st century. We chose to completely change our marketing paradigm.

Outbound is Dead

You see, everything I just mentioned, plus many other advertising mediums I didn't mention, are all forms of Outbound Marketing, aka Interruptive Marketing. And this form of marketing is, for all intensive purposes, **DEAD**. I know, it is still out there, but trust me when I say it's dead. Or maybe better stated– it will never be what it once was. The world has changed.

The fact is people are getting better and better at blocking out interruptive advertising and marketing. Whether it's TiVo , Sirius radio, call blockers, etc; today's consumer doesn't want advertising to come to them. ***They want to go to it.*** They want to choose what ads they see, when they see them, and how they see them. And it is exactly because of this phenomenon that Internet marketing, or should I say “Inbound Marketing” is the future of the business world. Any supposed “marketing consultant” who preaches otherwise is doing you a serious disservice and should be barred from ever consulting again (I know, I'm a little harsh).

The Things “Professionals” Will Teach

Take for example a seminar I recently attended. The class was on effective marketing for pool and spa companies and what did the gentleman talk about? Direct mailers..... Print Advertising..... Phone Books.

30 minutes into this man’s class I was ready to scream, **“This guy is an idiot and it’s obvious that he has never actually owned a small business!!!! Don’t pay attention to a word he’s saying!”**

But instead I just sat at my seat and got nauseous as he went on and on describing ways in which these struggling pool and spa companies could dump their money into antiquated and old-school marketing mediums.

Alas, What to do?

When it comes down to it, today’s world of marketing and advertising is NOTHING like it was five years ago. As I’ve mentioned in other posts, a business’ marketing department, no matter how big or small, needs to be an information and content producing machine.

And before you say it, No, your business is not the exception to the rule.

Start Blogging Today

And how can every business start becoming an information/content producing machine? Although there are many, many ways this can be achieved, I will always say the first place to start is by having a blog. [Blogging has changed my life and the face of my small business.](#) Despite the fact that my swimming pool company only installs pools in the States of Virginia and Maryland, we get more [website traffic](#) than 99% of the pool builders in the world. In fact, I’ve only seen one company that gets more traffic than we do, and I think we’ll be passing them soon. By simply spending 2-4 hours a week, you can have such a transformation with your business as well.

So think about your business’ marketing campaigns and as you look forward to the future, ask yourself these important questions:

What percentage of our marketing/advertising is outbound, or interruptive?

What percentage is inbound? (Blogs, Website Traffic/SEO, Social Media)

Is my business a content producing machine?

Is my website a glorified brochure or does it teach, inform, and inspire?

What changes will I be starting as of today?

I certainly do hope you consider these questions and continue on your path of effective, inbound marketing. I know it's a different way of thinking but once you embrace this paradigm you'll be blown away with the effect it has on your business.

11 Reasons Why Your Business Should NOT Advertise with Yellow Pages

One of the most interesting facets of blogging comes with keyword research of one's own website. For example, I was going over the different phrases searchers had used during these past 3 weeks to find **The Sales Lion** and found quite an interesting pattern in terms of small businesses and their concerns regarding Yellow Pages. In fact, I think the following statements/questions are perfectly symbolic of the debate that is raging amongst thousands of small businesses all over the country trying to spend their advertising dollars wisely.

So in an effort to prevent any more business owners from using their hard-earned bucks on dead-end advertising, here are 11 of YOUR most interesting questions/thoughts (**only exact search phrases have been used**), and my responses:

1. Why so expensive to place Verizon yellow page ads in books?

Let me take a gander at this one by giving a short history lesson. At one time, the Verizon Yellow Pages was the evil empire of the advertising world. They managed to set up a paradigm amongst small businesses everywhere that success in life and in businesses ran through that little yellow book of theirs. They also established pricing structures that made it very difficult for business owners to down-size their ads when they realized the costs were too high. Such made for a financially debilitating cycle for many business owners.

Luckily for all though, this little thing called "**The Internet**" was invented and businesses far and wide celebrated cost effective advertising and marketing solutions that actually worked.....**Yeeee Hawwww!**

2. Should I pay for yellow pages?

Uhhm, in a nutshell, NO, unless you're the type that loves flinging dollar bills off of country bridges..... Listing your company name, number, and domain address is fine. Beyond that though, you're going to pay ridiculous amounts of money that could be better spent elsewhere.

3. How dead is Yellow Page books?

Can you say dead as Elvis?? In fact, I wrote an article about this recently explaining how the advertising model of Yellow Pages simply doesn't fit the mind of today's consumer. Today's consumer searches online before they do anything else. Their first step towards making a purchasing is essentially the first keys they hit on their computers at work or at home to begin the information gathering process.

Although there are certainly a few that would disagree with my Elvis analogy, it's safe to say that Yellow Pages, at least the "book" form, won't be around in a few more years as businesses get smarter and smarter with their advertising dollars

4. Why should big companies advertise in yellow pages?

Because big companies are well-known to waste thousands of advertising dollars freely and if they're going to do that, then there is no way better than with the Yellow Pages. But seriously, if a big company *is* still heavily investing in Yellow Pages advertising in this day and age then they likely need to fire their head of marketing.

5. Life without Yellow Pages my business

Life without wasting money is AWESOME. At least, that's my opinion. Since my company stopped advertising in the Yellow Pages last year (other than our name, number, and website listing) we have saved an average of \$2,000 per month. For all math gurus, that \$24,000 a year. Do you know how much killer web marketing can be done with \$24,000 a year??

Holy cow, the possibilities are through the roof. This is also why I'm always shocked when businesses squawk over spending less than \$10,000 a year on a lead generation machine and Content Management System like [HubSpot](#) when they're essentially burning money in the campfire with the crazy amounts they're paying in YP advertising.

6. Small businesses need to be in the Yellow Pages.

And I need to saw my ankle off with a spoon.....Ouch, OK, maybe that's not the best analogy, but the idea that a company has to be in the Yellow Pages to be successful is absolutely absurd. Yes, there are a few businesses where phone book listings are still very beneficial, like pizza delivery companies, but even they are now seeing more and more of their phone calls and orders being placed online. So, let's all say it together:

Small businesses do NOT need to be in the Yellow Pages!!

7. Yellow pages waste of money 2010

And 2011, 2012, 2013.....

8. My business moved do I have to pay my Yellow Pages ad?

This search phrase gave me a nice snicker. Just think, if this person's marketing was all Internet based, he could make the necessary changes at NO COST. Instead, he's stuck paying for words on a yellow sheet of paper that are sending customers to the wrong address. OUCH.

9. Why a business should not buy a Yellow Pages ad?

Boy could I list about 50 reasons for this one, but we'll just give 4 for the sake of time: The majority of consumers in our country won't even crack the book open nowadays. The costs are an utter RIP-OFF and would be much better spent on a content-driven web presence. The ROI stinks. We are, for all intents and purposes, a global economy. The ideas of companies simply marketing towards one or two towns/cities is going the way of the dinosaur.

10. What if I can't pay my Yellow Page ad?

Man, I feel for you. Heck, I feel for all the small business owners out there that have been swooned into thinking the Yellow Pages is still a viable marketing platform. But to answer your question, if I were your accountant I'd just go ahead and put the Yellow Pages at the back of my "To-Pay" list.

11. Death to Yellow Pages

Ahhh, I like this phrase. I'm not sure if the person that typed it in was asking a question or if they were making a toast. So if they were asking a question, please refer back to #3. If the person was making a toast, then I'm raising my glass to that!

Old-School vs. New-School Advertising Costs...It Ain't Even Close

The biggest complaint that business owners have regarding blogging and inbound marketing, at least initially, is that it costs too much and takes too much time. And, although I'd just love to argue both points, I'll simply expound upon the former here.

Let's use my buddies at [HubSpot](#) as our inbound marketing model for a second. Although they have quite a few packages depending on the needs of a business, we'll use their [small package](#) for the sake of comparison, which costs a total of \$3,000 per year. In comparison with other mediums, (keeping in mind these prices ranges vary drastically regionally and so I really don't want to hear anyone complain at how inaccurate these numbers are), these are the prices I was paying here in Virginia a few years back before I saw the light:

Billboards: Initial artwork fee of \$500-\$2000 and then average out to \$500-\$5000 rental fee per month. In other words, on the very low end, one could expect to pay \$6,000 per year on billboard advertising.

Phone Book: Ahh yes, my buddies over there with the yellow sheets of paper. Anyone that has ever advertised with the Yellow Pages knows that the cost can be unbelievably high, with the size of the ad being the biggest factor. That being said, an average-sized ad in the Yellow Pages is going to cost at least \$500-\$1000 each month, or 6-12k annually. At my peak, I was spending about \$40,000 a year on Yellow Pages.....which might explain why I hate those guys

Home/Trade Shows: The dreaded weekend killer, aka—The Home Show. Boy have I seen businesses drop some serious duckies on home shows in the past. Heck, I've dropped over 25k on one show in the past myself, which makes me want to barf just looking back on those wasteful days. On average, if a business does 4 home/trade shows a year, the cost will be at least \$20,000.

Radio: Business owners typically faint the first time they meet with a radio ad sales rep. In most markets, a 60-second spot is at least \$100 during decent hours. Considering that radio is worthless without decent airway saturation, a business owner can expect to spend about \$3000-\$4000 a month for a normal campaign in a decent-sized market, which equates to 35-50k a year.....ouch.

TV: Geez, don't get me even started on TV. The prices and costs vary wildly in this medium but just the cost of producing a commercial, much less running ads on the air, is an absolute killer—at least 25k-75k annually. (Or you could just go buy a \$150 flip camera and be viewed by millions on YouTube for free)

Direct Mail: ValPak, Reach, and the rest of the direct mailers have had their day in the sun, but the reality is that they are about as dead as the Yellow Pages. Notwithstanding, most direct mail markets will cost at least \$1,000 a month, or 12k a year.

Print: Holy Smokes. I once did a full-page ad in the Richmond Times Dispatch and it cost me \$4,000 for *that one single ad*. To this day, I cringe when I think about how big a waste that was. Heck, I'd have been better off just burning the money in a bonfire with my kids. At least then it would have been a pleasant memory.

Adwords: Oh boy, now here is a medium (albeit not old-school) that can bring businesses with the deepest pockets to their knees. A little over 2 years ago I was spending \$500 every 3 days (50k per year) on Adwords. For a pool guy, this was an absolute killer. What's crazy is that many businesses out there spend much, much more than this number.

So there's my take on old vs. new forms of advertising. Looking at these costs, you can see why I'm such a huge advocate of blogging, video, and other forms of inbound marketing to generate leads. Remember, unlike every form of advertising above, inbound marketing is the gift that keeps on giving. Just one blog article can conceivably bring your company leads for the next 25 years. Think about that for a second. The potential is truly unbelievable.

So learn from my mistakes and don't be dumb. Don't waste your money. Be great at one thing. Be a great inbound marketer. You and I both know that \$3000 is chicken-feed compared to the past. I can promise this will not only be the smartest move you've ever made for your business, but it will also save, and make you, a lot of dang \$\$\$

5 Advertising Mediums that Will Be Extinct in 2020.

We all know the world is changing. We can all sense it. Things just ain't the way they used to be. The activities that fill our days aren't nearly what they were just a decade ago. Technology is developing faster than any of us can blink an eye. And with all these changes, the world of sales, marketing, and advertising will never be the same. Nope, not even close.

I've owned a small business for almost 10 years now. The way I get leads today is nothing like when I started.

You see, today's marketing takes brains, effort, and a pursuit of excellence. It is social, all about giving, and has everything to do with teaching.

Today's marketing is the Internet. Today's marketing is your website and social media.

A New, and Better, Era of Advertising

Yesterday's marketing was laughable. It was essentially the antithesis of social web. It was the opposite of giving. The king was the one who had enough dollars to throw at more leads.

Luckily, for the ones that are willing to do what it takes, those days are gone.

And with them, old marketing mediums will join the Tyrannosaurus Rex, the City of Pompeii, and the Roman Empire.

It could be argued that the following mediums will still exist in 10 years, but let's skip the semantics for a moment and accept reality—emotion aside. Let's look to the future and embrace what has been, what is, and what will be.

So without further ado, here are 5 advertising mediums that will not exist in 2020

1. The Yellow Pages

The book that has killed more rain forests than any other will no longer be in the households of millions. For most consumers, this change has already been wrought, and assuredly many more will soon follow. Because of the lack of viewers, full-page ads that cost more than most people's mortgages will have no takers. Business owners will continue to balk at their laughable prices and direct their funds elsewhere. And with no takers, the Yellow Pages (and any other phone directory like it), will be a blip on the radar that is business marketing in the 20th century.

2. Local Radio

Yes, some radio will survive, but most of the little guys won't have a pulse within the decade. In today's market, the idea of selling 30 and 60 second ads to businesses and telling them that they have to do it for at least 6 months to "brand" their image is utterly laughable. Radio is short-term advertising. Let's not kid ourselves any longer and pretend it's a viable long-term solution for most small businesses, because it simply isn't. Too many people have learned to block out its commercials. iPods, Sirius, and the like are the new wave. The once king of the first half of the 19th century will now bow down to the new mediums technology has brought us.

3. Home Shows

If I had a dollar for every home show I've done over the years.....but alas, there days are numbered as well and I, along with thousands and thousands of other businesses, have finally learned to focus my energy and efforts elsewhere. Not only is the time, money, and effort of businesses squandered during such shows, but consumers can find out the latest and greatest info, gadgets, and home improvements tools online, which is much more appealing than paying \$10 to walk the halls of a convention center and hear some guy yakking away about his amazing "shammy" mop/broom/vacuum/you-fill-in-the-blank.

4. Direct Mail

Sorry *RSVP*. Lo Siento *Val Pak*. The idea of direct mailers being relevant today, much less 2020, is laughable. Yeah, they had their day, and were at times nice while they lasted. But with email and targeted online inbound marketing being a fraction of the cost of direct mail, the medium is soon to be dead in the water.

5. Newspaper

Honestly, this one makes me sad. There is just something special about a fresh, off-the press newspaper. But all good advertising mediums must come to an end, and newspaper is certainly no exception to the rule. Frankly, I don't know of any intelligent marketing department or business that is consistently using newspaper advertising today. The concept of spending up to thousands of dollars on one single ad, only to have it relevant for one single day, is utterly inconceivable to comprehend. Let's see, I can write an awesome blog article, at zero cost, that will possibly bring me thousands upon thousands of visitors and leads for months upon months, or I can spend \$1000 on a full page ad that may bring me a few leads tomorrow.....Golly, now that's a tough debate.

Chapter 11: Web Design that Wins

The 8 Major Mistakes of “New and Improved” Website Redesigns

Since returning from my conference in Vegas last week I have been very pleased to receive multiple emails from business owners who are stoked to embrace proper web marketing and finally bring their business up to speed with the information age. At the same time though, a large portion of these businesses owners are getting ready to make a monumental mistake. Why? They don't realize this essential truth:

A New Website Doesn't Mean Squat

That's right, it doesn't mean squat, at least in most of the cases. You see, the majority of “new and improved” websites I see for small businesses are no more than a better looking version of their previous train wreck.

It Ain't About Looks

A web redesign has very little to do with “looks” or “appearance.” In fact, the most successful web marketing small businesses understand that what defines a truly great website comes down to 2 essentials: **Freedom and Content**

What do I mean by **freedom**? Freedom means that you as a business owner can make immediate changes to any part of your website. Want to announce a sale? You can do it immediately. Want to post a new video? You can do that too. Want to quickly send out a mass email to customers on your list? No problem.

And what do I mean by **content**? To make a long story short, content means that you see your sight as an information vessel for consumers and you do everything possible to teach them the good, bad, and ugly of any possible decision they will make regarding your products or services. It means you blog regularly. It means you [utilize video](#). It means you see everything you do as a teaching opportunity.

So my question to those of you who are in the process right now of getting up your new website is can you say these two simple things? Will your new website facilitate your freedom of design,

creativity, and thought leadership or will it again be stifled, just as it has always been, by a webmaster that holds all the keys?

For those of you that have said “yes” to these two imperatives, I submit a further look at the necessities of your new site, otherwise you are just spinning your wheels and wasting your dollars:

The 8 Essentials of a New Website Design

1. An information and consumer driven blog: At the very minimum, write at least [one new article a week](#).

2. Video utilization and You Tube: Visually show all the steps and elements of your product or service.

3. Social proofs from existing customers, usually coming in the form of written and video testimonials.

4. Owner and staff [bio pages](#): Tell us about yourself, your family, your goals, your mission.....tell us about YOU.

5. Lead capture forms on every page: That’s right, every page. Whether is a blog subscription form, a free eBook to download, or a “contact” form—you must give your clients an opportunity to take the relationship to the next level on each and every page of your site.

6. Social Media Integration: Sorry, but it doesn’t matter if you don’t like or appreciate such social mediums as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The only thing that really matters these days is what your customers like, and as anyone who has been alive will admit, consumers love social media. It’s a part of our society now, and there’s no turning back. So accept it, embrace it, and start using it today.

7. Some type of content management system: This is a little behind the scenes (the website viewer doesn’t notice) but it sure as heck is a must for just about any business today and beyond. Whether it’s a more advanced/complicated CMS like Drupal, Joomla, or WordPress—or even a more simplistic system like [HubSpot](#)—you need to be able to make immediate changes and additions to your website, whether you are a “computer guy” or not. In today’s world, being a “computer guy” is grossly overrated thanks to the power of content management systems.

8. A vision: Do you know where your website is going? Seriously, what’s the goal of the thing? If you don’t know this and if your site doesn’t reflect this vision, then you’re off track. Know your website’s destination, and then make this destination a reality.

I really do hope those of you that are in discussions with a web designer right now will consider this list. Don't allow yourself do this half way and certainly don't let a webmaster rationalize mediocrity. Do it right the first time. Make no exceptions. Don't tell yourself that you'll add this or that element later. No, put yourself in the position to do it right immediately (meaning you have the ability to build all of the above) and I can assure you that such a move will not only save you major time and money right now, but it will also lead to major web marketing success as you continue to add content and value to your new web vehicle.

Website Bio Pages: Stop Hiding Your Face!

Just over a week ago, I started offering a [Free Small Business Website Analysis](#) to my readers, and the response has been awesome thus far. I've literally been talking to business owners and entrepreneurs all over the world in an effort to help them enhance their website and fully grasp what Web 2.0 is all about.

Although most of these business websites share similar issues and weaknesses, there is one surprising weakness I've seen thus far on just about everyone's site, which is the fact that they all *lack a face*.

What do I mean when I say face? Well, I mean exactly what I just said. A face. Specifically, **YOUR FACE**.

Here's the deal. Web/Marketing/ Sales 2.0 is all an extension of the fact that we all now find ourselves in the information age, and today's consumers, way more than ever, expect to be fed when they go to a website. They are also looking for relationships. Yep, the old adage that people will buy from those they like has never been truer, except now it's become, "People will buy from the web sites they most like."

As I've discussed multiple, multiple times on this blog, in order to gain a visitor's trust on your website you've got to give them tons of remarkable content. You must teach them. You must show them you are a wealth of knowledge when it comes to your product.

But you must also show them **WHO THE HECK YOU ARE**. As I mentioned, people buy from people they like. And sometimes, information isn't enough to gain their trust. You've got to reach out even further for certain consumers. This is what this blog post is all about.

It's about business owners, CEOs, and the like *showing themselves* on their websites. It's about these same people showing the consumer that "Yes," they are a real person behind the screen. Yes, they do lead lives like everyone else. Yes, they have a "unique" story to tell.

Blogs vs. Small Biz Websites

In fact, this phenomenon in many ways explains why blogging has exploded on the Internet and why many bloggers have avid and extremely loyal followers. You see, bloggers tend to open up to their audience. They're constantly sharing personal experiences. They're sharing their struggles. Their ups. Their downs. Simply put, they often find success by being essentially an open book for their readers and subscribers. (Hopefully, I fit this category.)

At the same time, the majority of business owners show no personality or presence whatsoever on their company website. Frankly, this is stupid. It makes no sense. Wake up guys and gals. This is relationship selling 101, and we've all got to embrace it.

For an example, here is my bio information, as well as a personal photo (my kids), found on [my business' website](#): (sorry if it's a long, work with me a little..)

Education: Graduated from Northumberland High School in 1995. Attended West Virginia University and graduated Magna Cum Laude with a B.A. in Spanish and a minor in Physical Education.

Interesting Facts: Captain of football, wrestling, and baseball teams in high school. Served a church mission in Chile from 1997-1999. Author of three published self-help books: Heavenly Father's Angels, Stop the Yawns, and Teen Talks to Stop the Yawns. Founded [www.PoolSchool.us](#), one of the most educational swimming pool site on the Internet.

Married to high school sweetheart Nikki and has three children: Danielle (9), Joseph (6), and Larsen (2). Named 2007 Young Entrepreneur in Residence by Indiana University. First person to ever come out with a ratings system for fiberglass pool manufacturers. Speaker for the 2008 and 2009 National Pool, Spa, and Patio Convention held in Las Vegas. Founder of the popular Sales/Marketing Blog: The Sales Lion.

Greatest Accomplishments:

"I'd have to say that my greatest accomplishment would be my time spent in Chile as a missionary. Despite having no ability to communicate with the people when I arrived to the country, I was able to become very fluent in their native tongue and witnessed many people's lives change positively through the Christian principles we taught. For those two years, all I worried about was the welfare of other people.

My focus was on one thing and one thing only. There was no TV to watch, no football games to attend, no dates to go on. It was truly a rewarding and unforgettable experience, and it established the foundation of the person I am today as well as the rest of my life."

Most enjoyable part of owning River Pools:

“I’ve enjoyed having a vision for the company and watching that vision come to fruition. It has also been rewarding the friendships I’ve been able to establish with customers, co-workers, and most recently with other companies with whom I’ve been able to assist.”

Hobbies:

All sports, (especially racquetball), reading, writing.

Interests:

WVU football, studying/reading the classics, motivational speaking, human relations, UFC.

Person you most look up to and why:

“While I was in Chile, my mentor was a man named Ted Lyon. This good man was full of love and compassion for others and has lived a life of service and hard work. He helped me to see the potential I have and pushed me to exercise my free agency in life to make a difference.....I must also make note of my beloved grandfather, who passed away recently at the age of 93. He was the kind of man that makes you want to be the best you.....when I was in his presence, it was almost like I was experiencing a moment with the Savior himself.....I look forward to the day when I’m in his presence again.....Thank you Grandaddy.”

Ok, so there you have it. If any of you were able to get through that, hopefully you understand what I mean when I say ‘Owner’s Bio Page’. In fact, I believe every *‘Meet the Owner/CEO/Founder/Whatever you want to call it Page’* should include the following:

Interesting Personal Facts

Greatest Accomplishments

Hobbies

A Little Info about the Family

Why You Love Your Job

A Personal Photo

The Results of Putting Yourself Out There

It amazes me how often I'll meet a customer on a sales appointment or on the telephone and they'll say something like, "Marcus, that so awesome that you wrote a book when you were in college." Or "Marcus, your kids are adorable" or "Marcus, so you went to WVU, I guess I won't hold that against you!"..... and on and on.

Because of my openness, a large portion of my customers and prospects know quite a bit about me before we even meet. But that's great, as there is nothing I'd rather hear from a customer upon our initial contact than, "Marcus, so great to finally meet you. I feel like I know you already!" (I've literally heard this hundreds of times.) In fact, it's exactly what I'm looking for, because the better a customer knows you, the more they'll be inclined to like you. (Assuming, of course, that you're not a freak) And as we all know, if they like you they'll probably buy from you.

So here is your challenge. Put your face on your website. Open up a little bit. Talk about yourself. Stop being a closed book and you'll be amazed just how much of a response you'll get from your customers. This is what Web 2.0 is all about.

8 Easy Ways to Enhance Your Business' Boring Website

Are you happy with your business' website?

Seriously, is it good? Or is it just like your competitors, just different words, pictures and fonts but essentially the same old boring information?

If you feel like your website could be better, this is written specifically for you. Although my small business' web site isn't perfect, it's pretty darn good and if I'm speaking frankly (which I find is always the best form of communication), it is in a class by itself in the swimming pool industry.

Now granted, my industry is not a difficult one to dominate in many ways. Why? Because it's driven by thousands of businesses across the country that are being lead, as Michael Gerber of *The E-Myth* would say, by *Technicians* (if you haven't read *The E-Myth* yet, you really, really need to).

In other words, in the swimming pool industry, most pool company owners are so busy working **"in"** their business that they never spend time working **"on"** their business. And what's that mean for their company website? Well the majority stink, plain and simple. 90% are glorified business cards. And I'm including here companies that use an outside source to handle their web design.

The reality is that many, many industries are the exact same. Too many technicians, too many uninspiring, uneducational websites.

That's what this article is all about. I want to give you 8 features you should add to your website today to make yourself appear more professional, more unique, and certainly different from the rest of the crowd. The ideas I'm going to give you here aren't the web version of rocket science. They are meant to be practical, yet effective. I've also made it so every example I use here refers back to my company website, that way you can see this stuff in real-time. Here goes:

Owner Bio Pages

Would someone please tell me why most company websites don't even talk about the company owner/ownership group? What is the deal here? We all are well aware, as it has been drilled in our heads 1,000 times by this point, that people buy from other people/companies that they LIKE. Well if a website has no personal touch to it, if it doesn't talk about the people that the customer is giving their money to, how in the world would you expect a customer to get that "warm fuzzy" we are all after as marketers and branders?

Giving unique and personal information/photos can go a very long way in establishing relationships of trust with a customer before they even start to deal with the company. For example, I find that about 40% of the prospects I see on my sales appointments have already looked at [my personal bio page](#).

On Your Mark, Get Set, Blog!

I've talked about this quite a few times but the whole reason my website kicks butt is because of the [blog](#). Blogging has transformed us from a rinky-dink pool company in central Virginia to an industry recognized name installing pools throughout all of Virginia and Maryland and with subscribers all over the WORLD.

Blogging is the future of information. If you haven't embraced it, get on board now and stop losing daylight. I'm serious about this and will be writing a lot more about blogging for dummies in the future because it's as important as anything else you'll do in business. You must be seen as a mover, shaker, and innovator in your industry. Blogging, bar-none, is the easiest and most effective way to achieve this task.

Lead Capture Forms

In today's world of business, it's all about [lead capture](#). In other words, your website's ability to have a visitor enter their information so that they are now in your pool of potential clients. If you study the greatest websites in the world, they all have this common characteristic. In fact, on

most you'll notice some type of lead capture form on EVERY page of their website. Like blogging, I'll be writing a lot more about the power of lead capture in the future and how it can literally save your business in these competitive times.

Find a Customer Near You

Almost no small business website that I have seen uses this tool but it's awesome, effective, and best of all, it's FREE. All you need to do is go to [Zipwise](#) and set up a dealer locator form, except in your case, you'll call it a customer locator form (or whatever fits your biz).

See the Site's Last 100 Visitors

Another really cool, free tool created by my beloved [Zipwise](#). By simply adding this small icon, visitors can click on the icon and they'll immediately see where in the *entire world* the last 100 visitors to your site came from.

Now you might be asking yourself why this is effective. Well in my case, it shows just how much scope and influence the blog has. I once told someone that our website gets visits from over 10 different countries a day. The person laughed at me and thought I was full of it until they used this tool on our site, after which they were blown-away. Your customers will also be very impressed.

Video, Video, Video

I've talk quite a bit about this important medium lately and plan to continue to stress its importance. As we all know too well, TV dominates our society. It is the means by which most people keep up with the world and learn about what is happening around them. Sadly, this visual form of communicating, teaching, and entertaining is more prominent than the written word, which is why every website should be chock-full of [video to go along with text](#).

This is also why it is a good idea to integrate video and text into blog articles as much as possible, as they will reach a broader audience that way. Currently, our company has created more educational and how-to videos (via YouTube) than any other swimming pool company in the world.....and our lead gets bigger every day.

Testimonials

Just like lead capture should be on just about every page of your website, so should [testimonials](#). As we have all seen from every cheesy infomercial ever created, social proofs are a powerful buying motivator. But just having a "Testimonial" page on your website is not enough. Who's to say that a visitor will even stop by that page? The likelihood is they won't, which is why you

should have testimonials, written and video, on every page of the site.

Talk about Product Cost, Pricing, etc.

I'm amazed at how many businesses refrain from mentioning anything about product cost before they've actually spoken with a prospect/customer. The question "How much does it cost?" is one of the first statements a consumer will make when researching a product, and if your website doesn't include such information, they'll likely look and find it elsewhere.

Before I even became an SEO nut, our website started receiving visitors from all over the country because it addressed openly and in depth the question of: "[How much does a fiberglass pool cost.](#)" This is why our website is ranked #1 on Google for this phrase and many just like it. I am not suggesting here that you give exact pricing and numbers for every product your company offers on your website. But giving a customer a solid range and price expectation is a very good idea.

Well those are just a few ways in which you can add value and authority to your company's website today. I could literally list another 20 or so but because this article has already crossed the 1500 word threshold, we'll call it a day for now, although it would be awesome if some of you readers listed your suggestions under the comments section.

If you have any questions as to how to implement any of these suggestions on your website, please don't hesitate to comment below or just email me directly.

9 Essential Keys to a Great Small Business Website

I've been working quite a bit lately with small business owners on their web presence and it's amazing how many of these good men and women just aren't getting it when it comes to the design of their websites. What's crazy is that in general, small business owners want to have a great website. They know that things aren't quite right. Notwithstanding, whether it be from a lack of knowledge, funding, or motivation; they're just not doing what it takes to have a quality and user-friendly website.

For this reason I offer an absolutely free small biz [website analysis](#) here at the Sales Lion. Although I give such a service away for free, the rewards I've gotten over these past 6 months for taking the time to help others has been nothing short of awesome.

But it has been during this time that I've truly studied the core components of what makes a great small business website. Although all businesses are different, the following suggestions essentially apply to everyone, so please do not see your business as the exception. This stuff

works, so do yourself a favor and **act first** then ask questions later, as the results will resolve any doubts or concerns you might have . So without further ado, here goes:

9 Features You Need to Add to Your Company Website TODAY

1. YouTube videos

Dang I love YouTube. It's benefits in terms of SEO, branding, and education are profound. I truly believe it's the most underused tool for small businesses in today's economy, especially considering it costs almost nothing. Other than a flip camera and a computer, all you need is a desire.

My company has a literal [library of YouTube videos](#) and we have many, many more in the works. We take the time to produce these videos because we live in a visual world. More and more people learn through visual means. In fact, the customers I see on my sales appointments have usually watched at least 3-10 of our company videos before we've ever even met. As you might imagine, this is 3-10 more videos than any of my competitors have given them.

2. Blog

I will beat this horse until my last breath. Blogging is sadly not appreciated my so many entrepreneurs and business owners, mainly due to their ignorance of its inevitable benefits. Although its benefits are practically boundless, here are 5 reasons you should be producing 1-2 blog article a week. Organic (free) search visits will skyrocket. Leads will continue to come back to your site. You will be known as an industry voice and innovator. If you're in sales, you'll spend less time *teaching* clients and more time *selling* to them. There are incredible cognitive benefits to writing out our thoughts daily. (This is an article in and of itself)

3. Owner / Staff Bio Page

What's the deal with owners of companies hiding their face when it comes to their company's website? Although websites need great content and consumer information, they also need to be personal and instill a sense of trust in the consumer. Just look at the example of Dave Thomas from Wendy's or Colonel Sanders from Kentucky Fried Chicken. These men were truly "the face" of their companies. Over 50% of the customers I see on a sales call look at my bio page before I even get to their home the first time. The impact this has on my ability to earn their trust is profound.

4. Lead Capture

If you don't remember anything from this article, remember this one phrase:

Every page on your company website should include a lead capture form of some type.

Now I know some of you may be wondering how to achieve this without looking terribly redundant and spammy on your site. Here are a few examples:

Blog Subscription Form

Quick Contact Form

Receive a Free eBook Form

Free Report Form

Receive a Quote Form

Questions/Comments Form

Order Our Free DVD Form

Newsletter Sign Up Form

As you can see, there are many potential ways in which to add lead-capture forms to your website. All these forms, which can also be referred to as “Call to Action,” are critical in your efforts to increase leads and build up your customer base. Remember, leads are much more important than traffic when it comes to a great website.

5. Social Media

Whether it's a “Become a Fan on Facebook: or “Follow Us on Twitter” form, every small business in 2010 needs to accept, embrace, and leverage such social mediums. I recently

consulted with a restaurant owner to essentially rebrand his company and our key tool in spreading the word was through Facebook. What's crazy is that we pulled off a wildly successful event without spending a dime on advertising. This is the power of Social Media.

6. Statements that Ain't About You

What I mean by this statement is the fact that most business websites come right out the gates bragging about how great they are. This is a huge mistake. The fact is, when consumers are in the research phase of making a purchase they **don't care how great you are**. They just want to know what you are going to do for them. What makes you helpful? What information do you have to offer?

To see an example of this go to the [homepage](#) of my business website. What's the first statement you see?

If you are considering the purchase of an inground swimming pool, this site was built for YOU!

Again, it's not about you or me, it's about the customer. And the best websites are the ones that *think* like customers, not like business owners.

7. Easy Navigation

Internet searchers don't like roadblocks. They also don't like confusing sites full of frivolous text. Unfortunately, small biz websites are famous for this.

This is especially the case with business home pages, which are often chock-full of text and wasteful information. Essentially, a homepage should be one keyword link after another, easily allowing the visitor to find the information they're looking for.

8. Proper Font/Colors

I made the big mistake of having a black background with a very light font color for quite some time on my company's website. Fact is, a dark background mixed with a light font is difficult for the human eye to read. This is also true with font styles. I'm always amazed when businesses design their site with fancy writing and colors, like cursive font for example. Although conceptually this may sound nice, it's a dumb move when it comes to readability and user

friendliness. So do yourself a big favor and keep your site's font and colors simple, clean, and consistent.

9. Testimonials

We live in a world of doubt and disbelief. Consumers are slower and slower to give their trust away to other companies. This is why testimonials are the key to any great copy, advertisement, or marketing campaign. For example, my company website has a customer testimonial on almost every page of the site, as well as an [entire page](#) dedicated solely to testimonials. Ask yourself these questions: How many testimonials are listed on my website right now? How many video testimonials do I have on the site? What percentage of the site's pages have some form of "social proof"?

If you're like 99% of the small business websites I've analyzed, you're likely seriously lacking in this critically important area.

10 Basic Website Design Skills EVERY Small Business Owner Should Know Right Now

I see it every day. Business owners, all over the world, are frustrated. They are finally starting to see where the web is headed. They now understand that consumers are turning toward that massive e-cloud (the web) to make all of their purchasing decisions. They know they don't have control over this part of their business and the feeling isn't a good one.

As I like to say it, **they've lost the keys.**

The idea that a small business owner doesn't have control over his or her company's marketing, branding, and sales success sounds ridiculous to many, but the fact is it's a sad reality for so many at this moment. Because such a large majority of small business owners in today's world did not grow up around computers, code, html, etc, many are forced to put the success of their business in the hands of someone that doesn't work for them, doesn't understand their business, and certainly doesn't share a passion for their products.

As we all know, this person is the infamous WEBMASTER.

Now don't get me wrong, as there are some great webmasters out there. But truth be told, most webmasters don't make it a focus to enable their clients. In other words, they are afraid that if they teach their clients too much, then they'll no longer need their services. Frankly, I can't stand this close-minded mentality, and it's why I've been doing so much small business web coaching

recently. The time for non-tech business owners to feel empowered and enabled is now.

Do You Hold the Keys?

Every business owner should hold the keys to their website. They should be able to start its engine, hit the gas, and drive it wherever it needs to go. Now does that mean a webmaster's services may not ever be needed? Of course not. It simply means that webmasters are there for support, but they certainly shouldn't be the person behind the wheel.

This is why Content Management Systems should be an essentially requirement for just about any business owner in today's world. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the beauties of CMS systems, they are changing web design as we know it by allowing guys and gals with little or no previous web coding experience to design their own site.

Enough is Enough

As I've shared before, not long ago I was a web design dummy. Heck, I was a technology dummy. But knowing my dilemma, I finally got sick enough to do something about it. That's when I learned about CMS technology, HubSpot, and the incredible powers of Inbound Marketing for my business.

Since that time, I've spent countless hours trying to get with the 21st century. I want to be on the cutting edge of web marketing success and technology for small businesses and it's my hope to infuse this same passion, as well as a general self-belief, in other biz owners who currently find themselves in a position of concern and stress just as I did a short time ago.

But enough of that, as I want to briefly state here 10 skills that every small business owner should know right now. If you don't know these basic skills, it is time to make a change, but we'll save that little point for the end.

10 Web Design Skills Every Small Biz Owner Should Know Right Now

1. How to Change a typo/text/etc.: Don't laugh, many business owners couldn't change a simple typo on their website if a gun was held to their head. Sad but true. If you currently do not know how to do this, you haven't just lost the keys, you've practically lost your business.

2. How to Post a Blog Article: Similar to #1, but as we've discussed over and over again here on

The Sales Lion, content marketing is essential for every small business. And blogging, as most are now realizing, is the easiest means where by one can gain the favor of search engines through massive amounts of helpful, user-friendly content.

3. How to Make a YouTube Video: We live in a visual world, and sales and marketing are more visually dependant than ever. What does it take to make your own YouTube video? About \$150 for a flip camera and a computer. That too much for ya?

4. How to Upload/Post a YouTube Video: Once a YouTube video is made, a business owner should know how to slap it up on their site within 2 minutes or less. Again, a content management system makes this little copy and paste procedure as easy as pie.

5. How to Upload a Photo: Gosh it used to be difficult to upload photos onto web pages. But now that most CMS allow designers to adjust photos (manipulate size) on the fly, uploads are a matter of seconds.

6. How to Rearrange a Webpage: If I went to my business' website right now, I could completely rearrange any page on the site within 60 seconds or less. In my case, this is made possible through [HubSpot's](#) super simple CMS, but having such an ability is extremely important in determining what works best for a site. An example of this is Amazon.com . Those guys are always tweaking and rearranging their site in an effort to see what has the biggest impact on consumer sales.

7. How to Create a New Page: Before the age of CMS, this was extremely difficult because it meant that designers had to deal with HTML data, a new template, etc. But today, creating a new page on a site is no different than creating a blog article. With a few blanks filled in, as well as the page's content, any business owner can create a new page on their website within a matter of minutes.

8. How to Add a Form: I'm a strong believer that every page on a website should include some type of form on it. And when I say "form," I mean something that a visitor can fill out (usually because they get something in return) and give you their information and from that point on they are in your sales funnel/customer base. This process is known as "lead capture" and it's incredibly important in today's world.

With HubSpot, I can create a lead capture form, including an automated response, within minutes. Once this form has been created, I can then post it on any page of my site by a simple click of the mouse. This is why if you go to my [site](#) you'll find a form on just about every page.

9. How to Integrate Social Media: We've all heard it. Facebook, Twitter, and the like are changing the world as we know it. What was just a "fad" a year or so ago is now a normal part of everyday culture. Consumers expect businesses to be a part of social media, which is why every business owner should be able to display their social media icons and info easily on their site.

10. Analytics: Although analytics is necessarily a design component, its importance is paramount. Sadly, many business owners don't have a single clue as to what type of traffic they get on their site on a daily basis. Not only that, but they don't know which pages are getting viewed, which ones are useless, and how much time visitors are actually hanging around their site.

Every, and I mean every, business owner should be heavily involved with their website's analytics. This is no different, nor any less important, than a business owner knowing how much money he or she has in the bank, or how many customers came in their store that day. And considering analytics are free (Google Analytics), it is inexcusable that any business owner wouldn't take the time at a minimum of at least once a week to really find out and study the traffic patterns and numbers of his/her website.

So there are 10 website design skills every business owner should know right now. How did you fare? Were you 10 for 10, or 0 or 10? If you find yourself unable to perform the actions I've mentioned here, then it's time for a serious change. In fact, you should sit down with your webmaster today and tell him that you've lost the keys and you want to get them back. If he hesitates, then you let him go and move on to someone that will empower you with such abilities. This is exactly what I did with HubSpot and it was the best decision I've ever made as a business owner.

So take back the keys, get control, and watch the incredible impact it will have on your life.

Chapter 12: A Little About Social Media

The Amazing Power of One Tweet to Change Your Blog Forever

On July 15th, I wrote an article entitled “ [Are you part of the Social Media Problem or Solution?](#)” Its performance was pretty normal for a post on TSL. Over the next 4 days, it was read about 2,000 times. Not bad, but not groundbreaking either.

4 days after that piece was published, I posted another article, “ [Hey Blogger, You’re Really Not that Important, Seriously.](#)” Arguably, this post was no better than the previous one mentioned, but it did have one glaring difference—Instead of taking 4 days to be read 2,000 times, it took 2 *hours* to achieve the same feat.

Quite the difference, wouldn’t you say? Even more interesting, the success of the post can be attributed to one single act:

Hey Blogger, You’re Really Not That Important. Seriously. <http://bit.ly/qDawaQ> @JasonFalls @DannyBrown

That, my friends, was the sole tweet that I sent out to promote the article. If you notice at the end, it mentions two people— [Danny Brown](#) and [Jason Falls](#). I included these two names because I’d quoted each in the article, and with their words playing such a pivotal role, I thought it only proper to make sure they were aware of the mentions.

The Domino Effect Begins

What happened next is what today’s post is all about. From what I could derive, once Jason Falls saw the article and read it, he sent it to his friend [Chris Brogan](#), who then shared it on Google +. And as soon as that happened, as the saying goes, the rest is history.

Not only did the article get read 2,000 times the first two hours it was published, but it continued to get read at a rather large rate over the following hours, setting an all-time traffic record on my

site for a single day, even more than the [Blog World New York](#) article.

As I watched these results with surprise and fascination that day, one thought kept coming to my mind—*The power of a single tweet*.

Fact is, had I not mentioned Jason Falls in that little tweet, he would never have read the article (I honestly don't think he knew I existed before that day), and of course would not have shared it with Chris Brogan, who then would not have shared it with his huge Google + base of followers.

Such is the potential domino effect of the blogosphere, and needless to say, I was quite grateful for its existence on that day.

Notwithstanding the power of this one tweet, this experience also reminded me of some other significant social media/blogging lessons as well.

1. The Power of Mentions

Whether it's a tweet, a link in an article, etc.—mentioning other bloggers is one of the greatest tools you have to promote awareness and form relationships. Although I honestly had no expectation that Jason Falls would even read the article, it was thrilling to know he approved of it enough to share it with another. But again, this likely never would have happened had I not used his quote in the piece along with mentioning him in the actual tweet.

2. Don't Kid Yourself, Help from A-Listers Can Make a HUGE Difference

In this case, I'm using the word "A-lister" in reference to someone in the industry that has a huge following. Although bloggers can grow a large audience without the help of the leaders within their field, it sure as heck speeds up the process when thousands of folks are suddenly made known of your existence simply because of one person's vote of confidence/support.

As I have stated many times, I wrote on the TSL blog for an entire year before forming almost any relationships with others. During those first 12 months, my growth was minimal and stagnant at best. During the 8 months after that, the community and readership has exploded, much of which is due to incredibly kind leaders (like [Gini Dietrich](#), Danny, Chris, and others) that have been kind enough to share my work.

3. Google + has Serious, if not Staggering, Influence

I can recall a time when I'd been blogging for about a year and Chris Brogan shared one of my articles on Twitter. Naively expecting a landslide of traffic, I was pretty bummed when it only lead to about 4 visitors to my site. But what happened when this same person shared an article on G+? You already have heard the results, and this speaks volumes, at least in my opinion, as to the potent power of Google's new social platform.

4. You Never Know When an Article will be a Home Run

What's so funny about the **"Hey Blogger, You're Really Not that Important, Seriously"** article is the fact that I really had no clue it would be so successful. In fact, I didn't even know I was going to write it until I was on my elliptical late, the night before it was published, and all of the sudden I thought, "Marcus, you big dummy, Jason Falls gave that incredible class months ago and you've never even bothered writing about it!" Minutes later, I was on my laptop and 45 minutes after that I was pasting it into WordPress. But this is how inspiration works when writing, which is why we've just got to stay open to promptings as they come and have our pen ready in-hand at any given moment.

5. If You're Not Using Social Media to Help Your Blog Grow, You Need to Get Your Brain Examined

Yes, learning all of these diverse social media platforms can be a little challenging, but don't fool yourself into thinking each one can't make a huge difference in terms of your blog's success (I honestly used to hate Twitter and Facebook). So whether it's Facebook, Twitter, or Google+ — Take advantage of these amazing tools we've all been given access to so as to experience growth and success.

Chris Brogan Unfollowed Me on Twitter and Now I Hate My Life

So here I sit, still staring at my inbox, just waiting for that moment when he changes his mind. But alas, who am I fooling? He's done with me. Gone. Ciao. Hasta la vista.

Who was I kidding? Just because he shared and commented on a few of my blog posts in the past, and just because we've chatted a few times in real life doesn't mean we're BFFs, right?

Wrong. Or at least I thought there may be the possibility.....

I'm sorry, I'm rambling a bit, aren't I? It has been a tough few weeks. Here's the background:

Operation “Unfollow”

Quite a number of days ago, super successful blogger/author Chris Brogan commenced “[Operation Unfollow](#).” Yeah, out of the blue, all of the sudden, he just wiped the slate clean on his Twitter account—all 130,000+ people.

And he didn’t even omit @**TheSalesLion** when he pushed that button. Unbelievable.

Since that time, Chris has made note of the various reactions, many of which have not been pleasant. Folks are confused, sad, distraught, you name it.

And I’m no different. After all, shouldn’t I be upset?? I have the right, don’t I? I’ve tweeted Chris’ stuff for years, mentioned him in my blog posts, supported him whenever I could. Heck, I even bought his audio book for Pete’s sake!!

But what do I get as payment?

A Big, Fat “*Unfollow*.”

You owe me better than that Chris Brogan!!!

What in the World is Going On Here?

We live in a world of change. And when it comes to social media, nothing seems to be changing faster. Who can possibly keep up? No one, that’s who. We’re all just trying to figure this out.

Chris Brogan unfollowed everyone because Twitter was no longer of use to him. He was getting inundated in junk DMs, his stream was nothing but a blur, and he wasn’t happy with the state of how he was using the medium.

So he changed it. He did what any one of us could/should do when we’re not getting the most out of a product or service.

But wait, Chris can’t simply unfollow all of us, can he?

Excuse me? At what point does a blogger/social media icon lose his/her rights to be normal, experiment, and possibly be wrong on occasion? If “John the Farmer” unfollows 20 people to shake up his stream, does anyone say anything?

Nope, nada. But let an “A-lister” hurt a few feelings and then everyone wants to make a judgment.

The Experiment that is Social Media

And this is where the problem lies for me—Why are we so quick to judge another’s actions when they are just like us? Brogan, as he would happily admit (IMO), is just like the rest of us. In other words, he’s trying to get his arms wrapped around all this “stuff.” When it comes to social media, every day is a literal experiment.

So what if he “followed back” 130,000 people? He didn’t sign his life away to those folks, did he? Was it a mistake to follow so many? I don’t know. Heck, Chris might not know either.

Like I said, he’s just trying to figure this all out. (IMO)

The bottom line is this:

Chris Brogan owes me nothing, nothing at all.

The guy gives me free value every stinking morning with his blog. Does he sell stuff? Yeah, sure he does, and he has every right to sell whatever he wants.

So do you.

So do I.

He can also handle every social media channel the way he wants.

So can you.

So can I.

The Problem of Self-Worth

And btw, Chris doesn't need me to defend him. Nah, he's doing just fine on his own, but I think the fact that so many people apparently base their feeling of self-worth on whether or not Chris Brogan (or any other person for that matter) follows them is really, really sad.

Is that where self-esteem is derived from in the 21st century? Do we base whether or not we want to get out of bed in the morning on number of followers, "likes," subscribers, "friends," Klout scores, etc?

What??

Frankly, I had no idea Brogan unfollowed me. I would never track a stat like that. I also don't track those folks that unsubscribe from this blog. Why? Because what the heck good does it do? Sure, I value every relationship and follower I have, but if someone does not feel the desire to "friend," "follow," or "circle" me, that's OK. I wish them well. The bottom line is if something like a "stat" is going to just distract me from reaching my goals, then I'm simply not going to pay attention. (Note, this is why I don't watch the news either.)

The Conversation Needs to Change

So am I really upset with Chris Brogan? No, of course not, I just appreciate some good old sarcasm at times. I applaud the guy for doing what he did. I applaud [both posts](#) he wrote on the subject. If one looks at them analytically, they are a study on the sad state of self-esteem in our society. And when I read the articles, that's exactly how I took them, keen observations from a guy that's not afraid to tryout what's on his mind.

So why aren't we talking about that? Why aren't we scratching our heads and saying, "We've come to this??"

Self-worth is way more than digits on a screen. I just hope we can all remember this as we continue to travel this interesting journey together.

Twitter: The Greatest Real-Time Feedback Tool in the History of the World

Yes, I really mean that statement. **Twitter, when used by audience/consumers/etc. is the greatest real-time feedback tool this world has ever seen.** Nothing comes close to it. It's better than Facebook, better than blogs, better than G+ , and certainly better than asking our friends, "How'd I do?"

Although this topic has been circling my head for quite a few months now, recent weeks have reaffirmed this message loud and clear.

What a Difference Twitter Makes

Earlier this month I spoke to about 150 swimming pool and hot tub companies at the National Pool/Spa convention about the powers of [inbound and content marketing](#). For 3 hours, we had tremendous conversation as to how their business could see an utter facelift if they would but only embrace a new paradigm of marketing.

And how did I do?

Unfortunately, I have no idea. Well, let me restate that—I've been told by many folks the seminar was excellent, but I've still not received one single written feedback form. Other than a handful of emails from companies wanting help with their web marketing, I've got zilch. Nothing. Nada. Furthermore, because they were your typical blue collar business owners and not very focused on social media tools, **not a single tweet** was made by anyone in the session in 3 hours of discussion.

Alas.....

On the opposite end of this spectrum, last week I had the absolute pleasure of flying to Toronto and speaking at the energy-packed **Meshmarketing conference** (represented as #MM11 on Twitter). And if there is one thing I learned about folks in Toronto during my short stay was the fact that they love their Twitter. Check that, they **REALLY love their Twitter**.

I had two opportunities to speak at Mesh—a panel discussion in the morning and a solo workshop in the afternoon. Despite the fact that I spoke less than a total of two hours, those incredible Canadians sent out hundreds of [@thesaleslion](#) tweets throughout the day. In fact, as I

stepped off the stage from my first panel, I was able to look at my Twitter stream and immediately know all the thoughts, comments, and observations from audience members.

Some tweets were funny. Others were serious. **But every tweet truly made for noteworthy feedback.** To help you understand exactly what I'm talking about, let's take a look at just a few ways in which Twitter taught me new lessons at this recent event.

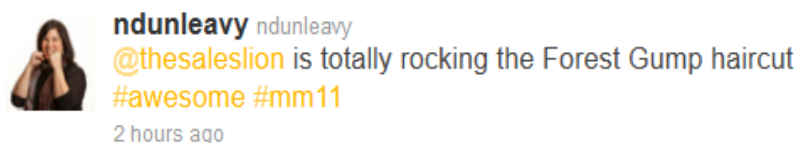
Twitter Will Show You Your Mistakes



During my panel discussion, I was asked about “engagement vs. traffic,” and which was the truer measure of success for a blog. My response to this (or at least the response I thought I gave) was “it depends on your goals.” In other words, just because a site gets a lot of comments doesn’t mean the site is profitable or reaching its goals. Engagement comes in many forms, and we just have to be aware of that.

Notwithstanding, when I saw this tweet from Jeff, and the subsequent partial disagreement from Matt, I realized I hadn’t explained myself very well, and thus needed to make sure I corrected the mistake. In order to do this I sent out a response to the tweet and also re-answered the question in my afternoon session. **Without Twitter, I never would have known of the misunderstanding.**

Twitter Will Tell You if You Look Dorky



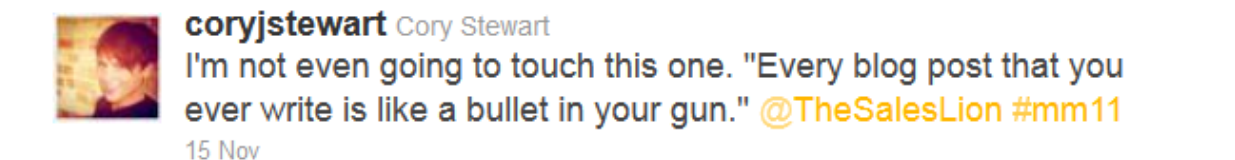
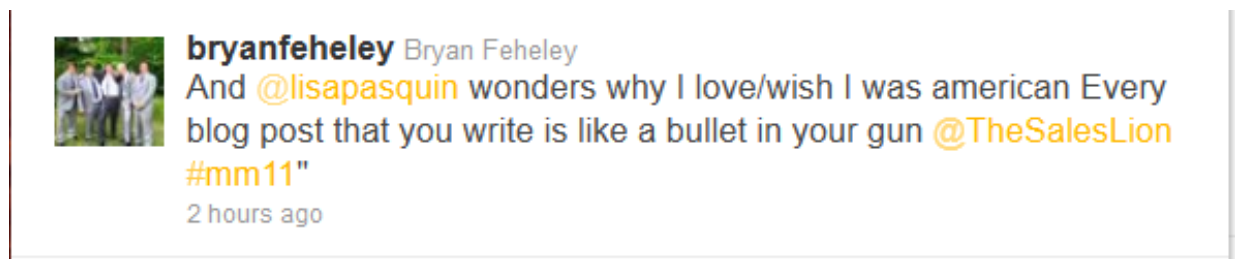
Ahh yes, my friend Natalie did just say I was rocking a Forest Gump hair cut. I literally laughed out loud when I read this tweet, as it was a truly powerful observational statement, with a load of humor behind it. Later on that day, Natalie told me she was actually being complimentary of my “military look,” but I still think it will go down as a classic.

Twitter Will Tell You if You’re Not So Dorky



Oh Rayanne! This tweet had me in tears. But hey, one minute I went from looking like Forest Gump to the next minute looking like Mathew McConaughey. Talk about two ends of the spectrum!

Twitter Will Tell You When You’ve Made a Cultural Blunder



During the panel, I made a typical analogy I always say when describing the value of a blog article: “Each blog article you write is like an extra bullet in your gun, ammo to use later on.....”

Boy did this little statement get a reaction! It was tweeted multiple times. As you can see, some

thought it was funny. Others probably not so much. Either way, in hindsight I now realize it got so much reaction because *I was in Toronto Canada*, a place where guns are few and far between, and not so much viewed in a positive light.

Twitter Will Show You Your Most Powerful Statements



JenniferKR Jennifer Rideout

Brag when appropriate. Your blog is for cnsMrs and should be written for them. The rest of your website can be about u >

@TheSalesLion #mm11

15 Nov



themuna Mike Connell

It's ok to brag. But blog is about consumer, website is about you.

Via @thesaleslion #mm11 limit the #marketingspeak

15 Nov



misscheryltan Cheryl Tan

"I like bragging, but at the right time. Develop trust first. Blog = Catered to consumers. Website = Bragging."

@TheSalesLion #mm11

15 Nov



suesthegrl Sue Holland

Your company blog should be used as a teacher... Your company website should be used to brag. - @TheSalesLion #mm11

15 Nov

Every good presenter and speaker needs to have an array of strong statements that audiences can remember. But the problem with coming up with these statements is the fact that it's almost impossible to know what those "hot button" statements are after the fact. Again, this is why Twitter is so amazing.

For example, I was asked during my panel discussion by an audience member whether or not it was OK to talk about/pitch one's products in one's company blog. As you can see from the tweets above, many of which I've not included, a blog should be about education whereas the rest of your website should be more "self-promotional."

Had I not seen all of these tweets though, I never would have known that statement would have such a memorable impact on listeners.

Twitter Will Tell You What Words You Abuse/Use Too Much of/or Simply Sound Funny to Other People



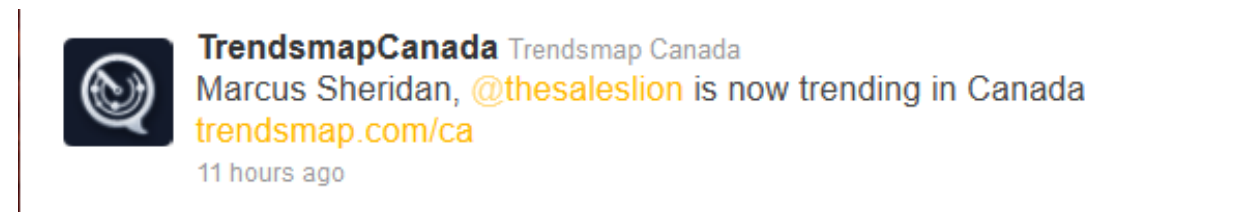
We all have a tendency to use certain words more than others when we speak and present. As for me, one such word I have a tendency to use to death in my vernacular is “dang.”

Twitter Will Tell You Just How Well You’ve Done



Wow Shannon, thanks, that’s awfully kind of you!

Twitter Will Tell You How Much Attention You’re Getting



I wasn’t kidding when I said Canadians were passionate about their Twitter. Heck, I’ve never trended in a country before and I don’t know if I’ll ever do it again, but this tweet certainly gave

me quite the smile.

I could literally go on and on about the value of Twitter as a feedback tool. The fact is, if you use this medium to your advantage you'll never need a "feedback form" again when delivering a talk or presentation (assuming the audience uses Social Media).

But this principle goes much further than talks and presentations, as it applies to a vast amount of other activities, like TV shows, commercials, events, blog posts, new advertising campaigns, etc.

If one really looks at this, the possibilities are endless. But the bottom line is this: Are you using this feedback tool to truly help you and your company get better at what you do?

7 Reasons Having a Twitter Feed in Your Sidebar is a Really Dumb Idea

It's official: Twitter feeds and sidebars are the worst couple since Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphreys.

(Yes, I'm serious and no, I've never actually watched the show.)

I say this because last week I invited anyone on my [newsletter list](#) to send me their website URL and I would reply with a very quick analysis of their site's biggest weaknesses.

45 minutes after the email was sent, I had about 25 responses already in my inbox.

Did I bite off more than I could chew? No, but after 40+ websites and 5 hours of analysis, I was able to see dozens of different industry sites and also some very disturbing trends (more on that in the coming weeks), with one of the worst offenders being mind-boggling Twitter feeds (aka "Streams" and "Timelines") that kept popping up in the most inconvenient of places.

Waiting for the Twitter Magic

But hey, I get it, I really do. 2 years ago, when I started with inbound marketing, I heard all about Twitter. That was when I, like many businesses, opened up an account (for my swimming pool company), put a Twitter "follow me" button on our website's sidebar, and waited for the magic

to happen.

After 30 days of almost no results, I got the grand Idea to put my real-time Twitter feed in the sidebar instead of just the simple “follow-me.”

Again, no dice. No leads. No prospects or customers ever mentioned it. Very few people followed. **It was an utter fail.**

You see, the sad reality is that too many people have drunk the Twitter Kool-Aid and grossly overestimate its value when it comes to web design and conversions.

Here’s why:

7 Reasons Why Putting a Twitter Feed in Your Sidebar is a Really Dumb Idea

1. That’s Prime Real-Estate!!!

When it comes to the web and conversions (converting a visitor into an actual lead), proper placement of call-to-action buttons, forms, etc. is a huge deal. For example, with most blogs and websites, great calls-to-action (like newsletter subscription buttons) are on the upper right side of the page in the column area or located just after the main content itself. Notwithstanding, many businesses have taken up this prime “conversion: space with tweets that almost never lead to “action” from a visitor. Think about it for a second: **Would you rather people read one of your tweets or have them give you their email address and contact information?**

2. People Don’t Know What the Heck Twitter Is.

That’s right. It’s easy for someone who uses the platform 24/7 to think the entire world is on there, but the fact is they’re not, and it’s not even close. Heck, 90%+ of the Twitter accounts ever created aren’t even actively being used.

Do some industries see a very high amount of active users on Twitter? Yes, that may be true, but they’re almost always marketing and social media niches, not average Joe business owners and consumers. In fact, a large majority of the world still can’t look at a Twitter stream without getting completely confused with the odd culture that’s found therein. Again, this is just how it is.

3. Four-Week Old Tweets Make You Look Lazy.

Here is what was really bad about most of the Twitter streams I saw in the sidebars—**They were practically dead.** Some had not even been updated for 2 or 3 months! Think about the impression a visitor to your site gets when they see you don't even take the time to update your account (assuming they even know what it is).

4. There are a Thousand Better Options.

Free eBook? A powerfully written report? What about a webinar sign up, or a list of popular blog posts, or even your newest YouTube video?

Here is the thing my friends: **People come to your website to learn. They expect to be fed. They expect to receive answers to their questions and solutions to their problems.** This is the essence of [inbound and content marketing](#).

You can either give this to them through clean content (in a variety of forms), or you can imagine them reading your tweets and being so enthralled that they beg for your business immediately. I don't know about you, but I'll choose the power of great content any day of the week.

5. Why Send them Away?

This one is a no-brainer. If you're sharing content on your Twitter stream that's linking to another website, and someone actually clicks on that link, you've now likely lost them. Or, at the very least, they're now pretty darn distracted.

Although there are proper occasions to link to other articles from your site, this is certainly not one of them.

6. Clutter is Bad.

That's right, too much of anything is a bad idea, and this is especially true when discussing Twitter and sidebars. **Derek Halpern** of [Social Triggers](#) has done a phenomenal job of discussing this issue of sidebar effectiveness in detail, but the fact is, simpler sidebars with less choices have higher conversion rates the majority of the time.

7. What's the End Goal?

Right now, you should be able to look at every page of your website and make one simple statement: **The main goal of this page is to.....**

This being said, if anything doesn't align with your goals, **you drop it**. Yes, that's right, just let it go. Once you truly understand your goals, especially on an individual page basis, the clarity of design and layout will be clearer than ever. You'll better know the calls-to-action, photos, and content that lends itself to success, and you'll also be able to intelligently ignore the "social media checklist" that grows longer each and every day.

I'm Not a Twitter Hater

Some of you right now are thinking I'm anti-Twitter. This isn't the case. I love the medium and appreciate its capabilities and potential.

But just because you and I love something doesn't mean it makes business sense, especially when it comes to website design and conversions.

Why Facebook and Twitter Don't Mean a Dang Thing for Online Success in Certain Industries

I've come to the conclusion that the most overvalued number in all of social media and marketing is that of total "tweets" and Facebook "likes" when it comes to blog posts.

Now, now, before the hair on your neck stands up and you start screaming, please understand there are always exceptions to generalized statements, as is the case here. Notwithstanding, I'm tired of seeing so many business owners worried that their content isn't getting "liked" and "tweeted" when all they really should be caring about is that **their stuff is getting read and accomplishes the bottom line goal of making money**.

That's right, I say "making money" because all the content and blog posts in the world don't mean squat unless they are leading to more trust, leads, and ultimately paying customers. But I digress.....

First Impressions in Social Media Don't Mean Much

What do you say we have a little activity, shall we? I'm going to show you screen shots of blogs on my swimming pool website, including the social media stats of each (indicated with the red arrows), and then **I want you to guess how many times that article has been read.** Sound good? Here goes.....

#1. Fiberglass Pool Prices Article

Fiberglass Pool Prices: How Much is My Pool Really Going to Cost?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan



How much does a fiberglass pool cost?or.....What's the price of a fiberglass pool?



This, of course, is always one of the first questions a pool shopper has when starting the research process for a fiberglass pool. The problem with answering this question, though, is the fact that a swimming pool has so many options it can be very tough for one to truly know what the price to swim in a fiberglass pool will be. Notwithstanding, I'll do my best here to give you some realistic price ranges as to what most people will spend. (And remember, these prices are AVERAGE, and can vary drastically depending on the product, the region

#2. Fiberglass Problems Article

Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions

Posted by Jason Hughes



By Jason Hughes

If you're considering the purchase of an inground fiberglass pool and done any research on the web, you've probably come in contact with some discussion of the problems associated with fiberglass pools. The

#3. Above Ground and Inground Cost Article

How Much do Above Ground and Inground Swimming Pools Cost?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan



How much do Above Ground and Inground Swimming Pools Cost?

By Marcus Sheridan



One of the first questions a pool shopper asks themselves when they begin the process of buying a swimming pool is: How much does a pool cost, and what are the expected prices for the different types of swimming pools?

#4. Fiberglass vs. Vinyl vs. Concrete Article

Fiberglass Pools vs Vinyl Liner Pools vs Concrete Pools: An Honest Comparison

Posted by Jason Hughes



Fiberglass Pools vs Vinyl Liner Pools vs Concrete Pools: An Honest Comparison

#5. Small Inground Pool Designs Article

Small Inground Fiberglass Pool Design Awards for 2010

Posted by Marcus Sheridan



One of my favorite parts of maintaining a blog about the fiberglass pool industry is the chance I have to look at the unique designs that manufacturers are coming up with as the industry progresses. Last year, we posted another very successful article regarding the [top fiberglass pool designs of 2009](#) but this year I wanted to break things down even further and

#6. Pool Patio Materials Article

Pool Patio Materials: Stamped Concrete vs Pavers

Posted by Jason Hughes







By Jason Hughes, www.PoolSchool.us

So which is the better swimming pool patio material: Stamped Concrete or Pavers? That's currently the debate in the pool patio world. Both are durable, relatively affordable, and look great; that's probably why consumers find them the two most popular options on the market today. But which is better? Let's discuss the pros and cons of each so you can decide for yourself.

#7. Viking vs. Trilogy Article

Viking Fiberglass Pools vs. Trilogy Pools Reviews / Ratings: Which is Better?

Posted by Marcus Sheridan

 Like  Tweet 0  +1 0  Share

Viking Fiberglass Pools vs. Trilogy Pools Reviews / Ratings: Which is Better?

#8. Swimming Pool Plumbing Article

Swimming Pool Plumbing: Rigid PVC vs. Flexible PVC, Which is Better?

Posted by Jason Hughes

 Like 2  Tweet 0  +1 0  Share

Swimming Pool Plumbing: Rigid PVC vs. Flexible PVC, Which is Better?

By: Jason Hughes <http://www.riverpoolsandspas.com/>

 Visit any online pool and spa forum and you'll find that a leak is one of the most frustrating experiences a pool owner can have. Finding, fixing, and not to mention paying for a leak will make anyone want to pull their hair out! Needless to say, a pool builder needs to use the best installation methods and building materials available to

Your Impressions?

Now that you've had a chance to see how each of these articles did in terms of tweets, shares, G+, and Linked In, what would you guess were the total number of page views (reads) for these articles? To review, here are the social media stats for the group: 19 Likes 1 Tweet 2 Google + 0 Linked in Shares

Pretty Impressive, right?

In fact, many “experts” in the world of social media marketing would submit that these pieces of content were a **complete failure**. But alas, those folks would also not know the following stats, exactly as they show today in my site analytics:

Article #1: **50,432 page views** with 471 inbound links

Article #2: **46,002 page views** with 424 inbound links

Article #3: **39,229 page views** with 707 inbound links

Article #4: **20,327 page views** with 185 inbound links

Article #5: **18,362 page views** with 196 inbound links

Article #6: **14,893 page views** with 157 inbound links

Article #7: **12,752 page views** with 123 inbound links

Article #8: **8,765 page views** with 208 inbound links

Grand total for the 8 articles: **210, 762 page views** with **2,471 inbound links**

What does all of this really mean?

Now you may be thinking, “OK Marcus, you got a few page views and links, what does that really mean?”

To which I’d respond, “Dang good question!”

But seriously, upon looking deep into my website analytics (using my [HubSpot tracking tools](#)) I can account for atleast **\$2,000,000 in sales from these 8 articles alone**. There is a good chance the number is higher, but it’s at least that much.

This number brings me back to my original question: **Were these articles a success?**

By this point, we all know the answer is a resounding YES.

But there are many lessons to be learned from numbers such as these, and here are a few:

1.Many, many industries and niches should not be using “tweets,” “likes,” “shares,” etc as true success measurement tools. (This is especially true for thousands upon thousands of blue-collar industries where consumers focus on reading and researching, *not* sharing.)

2.Just because something doesn’t get shared on Social Media doesn’t mean it’s not a “cash cow”–(drawing huge amount of visitors [usually through SEO], leads, and ultimately customers.)

3.Every business, industry, and niche needs to find what social media platform their customer are mainly using.....and then go after said platform like there is no tomorrow.

For some folks, this may mean your company focuses all of its attention, at least first, on creating great content through text and video on a blog. For others, it may mean you have the best Twitter account in your industry and drive much of your business through said account. As I’ve stated again and again, it goes back to the concept of [knowing your shtick](#) and shying away from being a social media jack of all trades, master of none.

4. To reiterate one more time, I think Twitter and Facebook can be great tools. They can also be decent success indicators. But every industry, and every consumer, is different.....**and we must never forget that.**

How to Change the Entire Social Media Culture of a Company in Less than 48 Hours

I’ve written quite a few posts espousing the value of social media and inbound marketing , but I honestly feel this one today may be one of my most important, and you’ll understand why if you read until the end.

Going About It All Wrong

When it comes to the social media cultures of most companies, almost every business I’ve ever seen is doing it completely and totally wrong. And because businesses are going about this thing

called social media/content creation the wrong way, **they fail**. Yep, with a big, fat “F.”

Here are a few reasons why:

1. There isn't **complete buy-in** from ALL employees (top to bottom).
2. Employees don't share similar understandings nor visions of what great content can do for the company and individuals as a whole.
3. Employees don't understand how to use their own skills to produce valuable content.
4. Everyone expects “the marketing director” to be the blog, the voice, the everything.

Change is Needed

I could seriously list possibly 100 more reasons why most companies fail when it comes to social media, but I'll just stop there. You get the point. Everyone has seen this. **Stuff has got to change.**

But I'm happy to say “change” is what this article is all about. Personally, I'm tired of hearing “gurus” tell me how content creation and social media are for “*experts*” with “*certain skills*” and they must have “*xyz talents*” and blah, blah, blah.

It's total bull. All of it.

Here's what qualifies an employee to help a company's social media efforts:

If any employee of a company has ever answered a customer question, then they're qualified.

Don't believe me? Just keep reading.....

How to Change an Entire Culture in 48 Hours or Less

Two weeks ago I flew to Michigan to help a company of 60 employees catch the vision of content/inbound marketing. I knew it was going to be a daunting task, mainly because we had a lot to cover in a short amount of time, yet we needed results immediately. Like many business in this economy, Company X (we'll call them that for privacy reasons) has had a rough go at it lately. They sell a product, quite high-end I might add, all over the world. But the sales just haven't been sufficient. They need results, BIG results. And they need them soon.

So their head of marketing and I got together and planned a two day event that would literally (we hoped) ignite a fire and vision within the entire organization and enable them to quickly dominate their industry through the power of inbound marketing. Here's how the schedule went, and whatever you do, make sure you read the final results of our efforts, shown at the bottom:

Day 1

8am

The CEO welcomed his entire staff and implored them to give their best over the next 48 hours. He explained how he had "bought in" to content marketing and in order for this to work, everyone else would need to step up as well.

8:20am-11:30am

For the next 130 minutes, I gave the group a complete introduction to inbound and content marketing, in a way that anyone and everyone could fully "get it." I also showed its impact on my swimming pool company's bottom line, how it had saved our business, and exactly the how each and every one of them could utilize their own skills and talents, within their area of expertise, to produce content as well.

12:30pm-2:30pm

Time for phase two. This section was all about giving the group, especially the sales department; the vision of how content is literally the greatest sales tool on earth. As in the previous segment, there was much Q and A, and the conversation was in constant flow.

3:30pm-5:00pm

Final education session of the day. I discussed “personalization” with the employees, and talked about the need for each to share more of themselves on the company website so as to form stronger relationships with their clients and customers (personal branding). We also dove into video and the power of You Tube in this class. I showed some of my most successful videos of all time and once again, the Q and A was excellent.

Day 2

(Note: I just stayed for the first day and the marketing director lead the effort on day 2)

Morning

A full review of the previous day with more questions and answers. Afterwards, the employees were divided up into teams to see who could come up with the most blog article ideas, using the [same technique](#) we had discussed for “content ideas” the day before.

Afternoon

Video time. Employee teams now produced their own videos (again, using teachings from previous day). Some were more humor based, others more serious, but everyone joined in, and it was huge hit.

Evening

Employees reviewed the day’s activities and watched everyone’s videos. Laughs were shared, stronger bonds were formed, and the social media retreat had come to an end.

The Results

The following week, I received this letter from the head of marketing. Please understand that I’m not sharing this note to brag about myself and say, “Look at me, I’m awesome.” Rather, I want companies to realize just how much their social media culture can change in less than 48 hours.

Here’s the letter, word for word:

Hi Marcus,

Well, mission accomplished my new dear friend! I am so proud of you and all that you did to rock the entire organization into a new reality. They definitely “got it” after hearing you speak. It was better than I dared imagine. Thank you so much for helping them all understand inbound/content marketing in a new and awesome way. And the coolest part is, not only do they get it..... they are EXCITED!

I have been getting text messages, email notes and IMs ever since the retreat from the most unlikely people thanking me. Even the biggest skeptics have made a point to reach out and tell me how much they enjoyed you as a speaker and that they have all these ideas now. It is going to be so very powerful having this many people unified with the same vision and equipped to make it happen.

The full report on Day 2.....

Before we could even start on the workshops I was really surprised at all of questions from the audience. I took it as a good sign that people had been ruminating on your content all night and were chomping at the bit for application. So that was cool.

Then the blog title brainstorm contest was the perfect activity to follow-up. All combined, the teams came up with more than **700 blog titles!!** (I’m not sure how many duplicates are in there but who cares..... over 7-stinking-hundred!!) Ha!

As for the rest of the day, people were wayyyy more into the personal branding exercise than I expected and the videos that people made were hi-larious! Some of them are actually worth keeping and sharing on our website. Matter of fact, Jason C’s was how to fix <insert equipment piece here> simply by changing out the batteries and he had his 6-yr-old daughter demonstrate (much like your video of [your son demonstrating how to clean a pool](#)). Now he’s going to work on a related blog post so that we can embed the video.

I’m going to follow-up with Josh N. again about the pictures tomorrow. I hope to get you something right away!

-K

P.S. I forgot to tell you that the real lasting proof of a successful retreat was the fact that **I had 8 blog posts in my inbox by lunch today and many more on the way.**

Your Challenge

So there you have it folks. Yes, it can be done. But the key here was the fact that the company, instead of segmenting blogging and social media into a small section of employees, decided to start everyone off on the same page, sharing the same vision (see Steve Jobs), and making sure they all understood their importance to such a campaign.

As a poker player would say, they're **All In**.

When It Comes to the Future of Social Media, We're All Clueless

A few years ago [MySpace](#) was the rage.

Today, although still popular, many laugh at the “antiquated” platform.

Tomorrow, the creation of Tom Anderson and Chris DeWolfe will likely have **gone the way of the dinosaur**.

Such is the world in which we live.

The same year MySpace was being developed (2003), some nerdy college kid named Mark Zuckerberg developed his own little platform, and called it “[Facebook](#).”

A few years later, it exploded.

Today, the platform remains strong, but its seemingly daily “developments” indicate more and **more change in the future**.

As for tomorrow, who really knows?

In 2006, some guy named Jack Dorsey came up with a blue bird and a 140 character micro-blogging platform.

By 2009, the odd culture that is “[Twitter](#)” had exploded in popularity.

Today, the platform still doesn't make a profit.

Tomorrow, **somebody will want their money.**

Not long ago, Google developed "Lively" in one of their first attempts at getting social. It lasted less than a year.....and then "Lively" died. Then Google got smart. And they developed "Buzz." Unfortunately, it stunk too. Bye, bye, Buzz.

Now Google has circled the wagons again. G+ is the "New Kid on the Block," **the "next great social media platform."** Will it last? [Brogan](#) says "Yes." [Kawasaki](#) does too. Frankly, I don't think any of us have a dang clue.

Heck, even **Seth Godin** didn't think the [web would make it big.](#)

And Seth is pretty smart.

What Will NOT Change

I cite these examples because although we talk, blog, and write books day in and day out about all this social media "stuff," we really don't have the slightest idea as to the future of any of these platforms.

Some will survive. Some will not.

But chances are, as with everything tech and media, they'll all be replaced, reinvented, or removed from the annals of history. Again, that's how it goes. C'est la vie.

But do you know what won't change, especially for any business that wants success as we all look to the future?

Great teaching

Value

[Powerful Communication](#)

Thoughtfulness

[Transparency](#)

Kindness to others

Genuine Service

Legitimate Relationships

These words have existed since the beginning of time and their significance and importance moving forward are infinite.

Is it fun discussing whether or not MySpace will survive, or G+ will dethrone Facebook, or if Twitter will pay its bills?

Yeah, maybe so, but let us not forget the difference between binding ourselves to temporary “platforms” versus attaching ourselves to the timeless qualities that truly dictate greatness.

Please Retweet, Share, and Snail Mail this Post to Everyone on Earth You Know

I was within minutes of publishing another article this morning until I read [Chris Brogan's](#) words today on **whether it's right or wrong to ask another person to RT (retweet) your blog posts**. In his article, Brogan states:

I've come to an opinion on something (and as with all opinions, it's about as useful as sesame seeds on a bun): asking for a retweet or mention of something – that isn't cause related – isn't cool.

Again, unless it's a cause, and then ask shamelessly and often for retweets or mentions, but otherwise? Let your work live or die on its own creative merits. It just doesn't make sense to bother people to ask them to falsely spread information that wasn't interesting to get there on its own.

But, I could be wrong.

This is what I love about Chris—He has something on his mind and he’s not afraid to share it. And because I love the guy’s work, I’m happy to admit that **I completely disagree with him in this case**. In fact, I don’t even know if Chris completely agrees with himself here

5 Reasons Why You Should Ask People to Share Your Work

1. You’ve earned It.

We always hear talk of “Building Your Tribe,” right? In fact, building a group of people that actually believe in your work and you as a leader is dang awesome, as the whole world has been built around great men and women who understood this power of leadership and influence.

Hard work earns respect. Respect gives us the right to ask things/actions of our “followers.” And despite what some may want to admit, **followers want to be lead**. It has been this way since the beginning of the world.

2. A Whole Lot of Folks Have No Idea They Are Supposed to Share.

A few day ago, my office secretary called me after reading one of my blog articles and asked me a simple question: “Marcus, how do I share this on Facebook?”

She, like millions of other people, has never shared anything on social media before, which is why any savvy writer, businessperson, or leader will help these millions of people to know that it is actually possible “share” things they read online with their friends. Show them how to do it.

3. What Defines ‘Cause’?

To some folks, a “cause” might be to help earthquake victims, persons that have been abused, etc. Although I completely agree with these important “causes,” I see the stuff I’m writing about as profound causes as well.

I teach businesses how to be successful. If they’re successful, they turn profits. If they turn profits, then they can not only pay their employees, but hire new ones. If they keep and hire employees, more families keep their home, more spouses and children have less stress in their lives, there is more food on the table, and children are generally happier.

Heck, I could go on and on all day about the power of marketing and smart business to change lives, but the fact remains: It's a cause as important as any other because it brings peace to the lives of men, women, and children around the globe. **Is that not worth asking others to share?**

4. Everyone Has a Choice.

So you asked me to share your “stuff,” right? Well does that mean I have to? Of course not. I still have my ability to discern, choose, and make my own decision. If someone shares something blindly, then it's their problem, not the problem of the person that made the request.

5. It's Done in Every Walk of Life.

Have you ever asked a customer for a referral? Have you ever heard a politician ask others to help their friends, neighbors, etc “get out and vote”? I could literally name example after example of how we ask others every single day to do things they may not have done otherwise.

The bottom line is this: Motivating others is one of the great keys to finding success in life, and this is certainly true when it comes to blogging and content marketing. If asking for someone to share your work helps a person come a little closer to their goals, then awesome.

Will some people abuse the system? Yes, of course. But abuse of anything never pays off. It will come back to bite them, there's no doubt about that.

I want to reiterate that this is no “attack” on Chris at all. He was extremely humble in his opinion with regards to this subject, much more than I would likely be, and not only do I respect his work but I share it often.

Chapter 13: eBooks and Other Good Stuff

5 Reasons Every Small Business in the World Should Write an eBook

That's right, you should have an eBook. And no, you're not the exception. What, did you say you were an auto mechanic? Yes, your company needs an eBook. I'm sorry, did you say you were a roofer? Yep, you too, you need an eBook. So you're a professional lion trainer.....Wow, you *really* need an eBook.

A lot of people out there in the world of business think eBooks are some weird thing found on the Internet that only teaches other weird people how to make more money online.

Although this statement may partially be true, it's far from the reality. It's time to shed a little light on this thing called small business and eBooks.

My Story

A few years ago I wrote an eBook for the swimming pool industry. The eBook was entitled "How to Buy a Fiberglass Pool the Right Way, at the Right Price, from the Right Company." When I wrote the book, I really only had two main reasons: There was a huge need and I saw an opportunity to make a decent supplemental income off of said need.

But little did I know that such an eBook would initiate a major change in my life and in my business. And as time went on, I came to understand more and more the incredible benefits that any business can attain simply by taking the time to achieve such a work. So let's talk about these benefits and then maybe some of you average Joe business owners out there (like me) will make writing an eBook a goal.

5 Small Business Benefits to Writing an eBook

1. Your Company Doctrine

That's right, your company needs its own doctrine. What do you believe? What methods do you adhere to with your product or services? For example, in my swimming pool eBook, I stated that it was a moral imperative that a fiberglass pool was back-filled with stone/gravel instead of sand.

At the time, this was not a construction technique that was heavily practiced around the country. But because of the influence of the eBook, as well as our company blog, it is now the majority. In fact, I've had pool builders from various parts of North America call me over these past few years and tell me how a customer had bought my book and required the builder to use gravel instead of sand. Pretty powerful, don't you think?

So don't be afraid to come up with your company's doctrine. What is the gospel according to YOU? By so doing, your eBook will set standards for greatness and also act as a compass for you and other businesses in your niche.

2. Forced Cognition

I've talked about this concept before but I'll never grow tired of it. Here's how it works: The more you think and write about something the better you'll get at explaining it to others. For example, I write about sales and marketing all the time. Do you think it's hard for me to talk to a client or give a seminar on this stuff? Heck no, it's a piece of cake, but that's only because of constant thought regarding the subject matter.

3. Become the Authority

Would you like to be an authority in your field? If not, then I dare say something is wrong and you need to choose a subject/profession you care more about. Since writing my eBook and writing so much about fiberglass swimming pools, I've essentially become the consumer voice of the industry. This year alone I was asked to fly around the country to consult with homeowners that had read my eBook and wanted to pay me to oversee their pool installation.

I was also called by lawyers on various occasions to give "expert" testimony on the subject. I could go on and on about this one but just ask yourself this: How many of your competitors have written an eBook that teaches consumers about your product? In almost every industry, the answer is less than 1%. Think that might make an impression?

4. Knowledge Equals Trust and Sales

Before I go out to a customer's house to sell them a swimming pool, guess what they're required

to do? Yep, that's right, they have to read my eBook. By so doing, they will become more informed on fiberglass swimming pools and options than 99% of pool shoppers in the world.

But not only will the potential customer now be very informed, but they'll also know my stance on everything. They'll have invested their time to read my teachings, and because of it, they'll feel informed and prepared. Once they've reached this point and read the book, what do you think happens to closing rates? That's right, they go way, way up.

I call this process of required reading [Assignment Selling](#), and it has literally changed my life as a sales and marketing professional.

5. You Now Have a Ton of Killer Content

Guess how many swimming pool articles my eBook made? If you guessed "a lot," you're right. There is nothing easier than taking a large eBook and turning it into 25 blog posts, or taking 25 blog posts and turning them into an eBook.

But the key here is content. No matter what your business is, you must accept the reality of content production. You've got to embrace and become passionate about giving great information to your consumer base. Once you get this, your life as a business owner will get much, much easier.

So there you have it folks, 5 reasons to get on your horse and start that eBook that's just waiting to leave your brain and find its place on paper. Oh, and one final thing—No, the eBook does not have to be that long. Anything more than 10 pages is pretty dang awesome in my book, so don't let length hold you back. Get 'er done!!

5 Reasons Why Your Follow-Up Emails Stink and What You Can Do About It

Do your emails to prospects and customers stink? Seriously, what type of response are you getting as you follow up with leads and touch base with your established customers? If you're like most small businesses, chances are you're frustrated with the poor percentage of responses you're getting back.

One minute you think you've got a hot lead. The next minute you're back to the drawing board. Trust me, I've been there. Heck, I think anyone who attempts to sell or market anything

whatsoever has experienced frustrations over a lack of what we'll dub "*Email Response Love.*"

Follow-Up Frustration

This was certainly the case at a recent conference I taught at for builders in the fiberglass swimming pool industry. You see, the way it works in the fiberglass industry is there are manufacturers and builders. The manufacturers are typically larger businesses and therefore have stronger marketing departments. This allows them to generate consumer leads on their websites and in-turn send the lead to whichever pool builder is in that consumer's area.

Often times, these leads do not consist of a phone number and the only information a builder has to work off of is a name and email address. And the following up with these leads is often the center of great frustration for pool builders trying to generate sales appointments with consumers who are slow to respond.

This scenario is essentially no different than most small and large businesses throughout the world. More and more, consumers are slow to give out their personal information. And often times, a simple email is the only channel by which a business can work its marketing magic and initiate a relationship with the prospect or potential customer.

They Stink

The problem with follow up emails is essentially the same across the board. They're boring and they stink. Here's an example:

Dear Prospect,

We would like to thank you for your interest in a Widget 2000. In order to help you learn more regarding our Widget 2000, please respond to this email or call me directly on the number below.

Sincerely,

Sales guy

888-555-666

Widget Industries

Ok, now you might be thinking that most follow up emails aren't that bad, but let me tell you

that they ain't much better. I've seen countless examples of company email follow ups and at least 90% are seriously lacking in originality, content, and character. But when it comes down to it, you've got to ask yourself the following question:

How much value do my emails really have?

Although this may be a tough question to answer for some, I have listed five essential components of follow up emails. Since I implemented all of these tools in my email arsenal, the response I've been getting from customers is phenomenal and the rate of response has shot up drastically. Here goes:

5 Essential Tools to Awesome Email Follow Ups

1. You Tube Video

Let's just start with the best first, shall we? As everybody who reads this blog is well aware, I've been preaching from the rooftops for some time now that if you're a small business owner and you don't own a flip camera, then you need to have your brain examined. The reason why flip cameras can literally transform a business is because they are the simplest tool available on the market today to produce You Tube videos.

The power of You Tube for small businesses is utterly unbelievable, which is why business owners and their marketing departments should be looking to produce these short videos every possible chance they get. My company has about 100 You Tube videos that we've produced and these actions have branded us on a national level. In late 2009, I started including the You Tube videos in all my email follow ups as well, and the results have been extremely positive.

An example of this would be:

View this awesome Fiberglass Pool Installation Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osQqatNgKzw>

What's even better is the super nerds over at Google have now made it possible to send You Tube videos via Gmail and the receiver can actually see the video on the Gmail window, which is awesome. In other words, all one has to do when sending an email is insert the URL link to that particular YouTube video and the video will appear at the bottom of the screen for the viewer to see, without even leaving the page. (Currently, this is mainly a Gmail feature.)

Just imagine what your business could do by integrating video into your emails. Instead of introducing yourself or your products by words alone, you can add the power of visual. **Dang I love technology**..... And again, if you haven't already done so, stop being a slacker and pony-up

\$150 for a simple flip camera!

2. Attach an eBook

eBooks are awesome for a variety of reasons, one of which is the fact that customers will actually read them. Not only does this eBook sell at a national level (making me a nice supplemental income), but I also send it out for FREE with every email that goes out to a new lead. For example, lead emails will say something to this effect:

I've attached here a copy of my popular swimming pool eBook that sells nationally at my other website (www.PoolSchool.us). I can promise you that this 55 page guide will completely enlighten you as to the mistakes people make when purchasing a swimming pool. It will also heavily discuss pool options, pricing, sizes, manufacturers, etc. Please take the time to read its pages, as I can assure you it will be well worth your time.

As you can imagine, when a consumer, who is contemplating spending 30k+ on a swimming pool sees this, they are very likely to read the book and receive a lasting impression from the supplier of that valuable information.

3. References

Our company sends (via attachment) a complete customer reference list to every new lead that comes to our system. In other words, before I even meet a prospect the first time they have already received 600+ names, addresses, and phone numbers of happy customers that have done business with my company. And can you imagine the reaction I get from potential clients upon receiving such a list? Nothing short of surprise and amazement are the results of such a mountain of information.

4. Links to Your Blog

Blog, blog, blog. Along with video, blogging is the greatest marketing tool a business has in this Web/Marketing 2.0 era. This is why it's imperative your company maintains an active blog and also why every email you send to every customer should have a link to a recent and/or applicable blog that your company has written. In the case of my business, we always place strong and eye catching article titles at the end of our emails, just before the signature, and it appears in this manner:

And make sure you review these compelling articles from our blog:

[7 Deadly Sins of a Fiberglass Pool Installation](#)
[Fiberglass Pool Manufacturers: Who Will Survive?](#)

5. Questions

Too often, follow up emails are only about the company, and not enough about the customer. Emails should not only demonstrate to your customers that you're a thought-leader in your industry, but they should also show that you genuinely are interested in hearing the customer's concerns, thoughts, questions, etc. This is why every email to a customer/prospect should ask at least one, if not more, questions. I'm not going to give examples of questions here because that should go without saying, but again, the key is that you actually show the customer you care by submitting the question(s) in the first place.

So those are my top 5 additions to follow up emails that just about every small business in the world should be utilizing today. As you contemplate the implementation of these tools and techniques into your business, ask yourself the following question:

How many of my competitors are taking such strong action in their emails?

I'd imagine that likely none of your competitors are utilizing all of these tremendous tools, which is further reason for you to make such a change today. Do not wait. I can assure you that if you only follow these five steps you'll see a monumental improvement in your email marketing strategy.

Anthologize: How to Build an Awesome eBook with Existing Blog Posts

We've all heard it: [Every blog and every business should have an eBook](#). Until very recently, this simple truth had been eating at me for quite some time, and I knew it was time to get 'er done. Heck, after 250 posts on TSL, I certainly had enough content to talk about my eBook's theme of content and inbound marketing.

But the idea of going back and organizing all those posts and putting them in a new format sounded absolutely daunting and time consuming—that is, until, I heard about [Anthologize](#), quite possibly the greatest eBook building tool I've ever seen for anyone who has a blog, but just wants to **combine that content** into a repackaged eBook.

This past Thursday, when I announced my 230 page [eBook on Inbound and Content Marketing](#) (the largest of its kind on the web btw), many folks wanted to know more about this free plugin Anthologize and my experience with it. Considering eBooks have been and will continue to be a hot topic as we roll forward in this digital marketing era we now find ourselves in, such a need makes total sense.

For [Inbound and Content Marketing Made Easy](#), with the help of Anthologize, **the entire project took me less than 5-6 hours, start to finish**. A good bit of that time was spent editing each post once it had been made a “part” of the book so as to take out the photos, unnecessary links, as well as the “Your Turn” segment at the end of each one of my posts that asks readers questions so as to promote conversation in the comments section. I also added some new HubSpot content as well, plus the intro section.

Had I not had **Anthologize** for this project, it likely would have taken somewhere between 25-30 hours of time to get such a mass of content organized. Even better, as I continue to write new posts in the future, **I’ll be able to add them to the eBook in seconds**, which means the eBook will stay on the cutting edge and eventually be a content/inbound marketing encyclopedia in its own right. Pretty dang cool, huh?

Enough Talking, Let’s Start Walking

So give it a try. Take those old posts, morph them together, go to [Fiverr](#) and get an ebook cover for \$5 (like I did), and then start [building your list](#).

On Thursday, the day I announced this eBook, about 150 people downloaded the eBook and were added to my list. Another 130 came in on Friday. As you can imagine, I only wish I had known about Anthologize much sooner and embraced this incredible tool earlier on.

But hey, at least *you* now know and can do something about it, right?

Chapter 14: Further Inspiration

11 Hours to Change a Company Forever: A Story about Business and Life

June 8 2011(**Times reflect Eastern Standard)

12am: Headed to bed early tonight, as I'll be waking up again to drive to the airport in just a couple of hours. I'm a little nervous about today, but excited as well. You see, I'm headed to Phoenix Arizona for the day, where I'll be working with a start-up small business, [Gatewings](#), to help them with their marketing efforts. They've been using [HubSpot](#) and don't seem to yet fully understand the system nor inbound marketing in general. That's where I come into play. They're counting on me to change that, and I'll have roughly **11 hours** with them of intensive training to make this dream a reality. Yep, it's going to be a very interesting day.

2:30am: Up again. I'm feeling pretty good despite the lack of sleep. After one of my typical 90 second showers, I'm closing the side door and pulling out of our driveway. In 10 minutes I'll be picking up my business partner Jason and we'll be off to the airport.

4:30am: Just arrived to Richmond international. Because I live in the "sticks" of Virginia, it takes about 90 minutes to get to the nearest major airport. That's OK though. My wife and kids love where we live—a small town with a rural feel. I love it too, it just means I have to drive a good bit to get anywhere. But here I am, and after a short layover in Charlotte NC, I'll be headed west.

8:30am: Flying at 10,000 feet, Jason and I are taking this time to fully look over our client's website. Upon further reading about Gatewing's co-founder [Nancy Genys](#), I'm blown away. Literally, her story of losing 2 children, her father, and her business in the course of 3 years is as moving and gut-wrenching as any I've ever heard. But instead of rolling over into the fetal position and cursing the world around her, Nancy felt prompted to start Gatewings so as to help others during their time of loss and tragedy. I believe in their mission, and simply cannot imagine what reaction I would have upon experiencing such loss in my life.

12:30pm: Just touched down in Phoenix. Nancy's business partner, Steve Brinton, is picking us up at the airport. It's time to get to work, and now I'm ready to make a difference.

1:15pm: We've got a little over 10 hours to make strides, so for the first part of the day it's my goal to help these people (Steve, Nancy, and two others) to understand the common elements

that should be on every page of their website. Right now, they're lacking two major components—**Social Proofs** (in the form of videos, photos, written testimonials, etc) and **Calls to Action** (contact forms, free offers, etc).

After spending a few hours on these subjects, I can tell the light bulbs are coming on. People that just hours earlier could not look at their site's pages and pick out the flaws to see what was lacking can now identify all the core problems and needed additions. Basically, they've now started to develop the "inbound marketer's" eye and they're also thinking more like a consumer. This **shift** is essential, and I'm very happy they're getting it.

6:30pm: Like most small business owners, these folks have never made their own videos, so for the next 2 hours Jason and I will do an actual video interview of the company's owners and then go through the editing process with them so as to put them on their website. We're going to keep this simple but the goal here is that from this point forward, they can record, edit, and upload any video they want—thus truly leveraging the amazing power of this often underutilized visual medium.

9pm: Videos went great. We did two quick interviews and after Jason and I showed everyone the process, Nancy completely edited and uploaded one herself to YouTube, and then put the code on her website. I can tell she's excited to have picked up this skill so quickly and despite the fact that we've now been training for 8 hours straight, everyone is still mentally engaged and excited.

10pm: For the last hour we've been working on what I call "The First 50," or, in other words, the first 50 blog articles on the Gatewings blog. Using the [content brainstorming activity](#) I've talked so much about before, we've now got 4 months worth of articles lined up with a set publishing schedule as well. I'm really, really excited about our plan, as I know these 50 articles will form an incredibly effective and traffic-driving long-tail keyword campaign— and could very well change this company forever.

12am: The long day is coming to a close. Our final activity is to lay out a priority plan for the coming months. So often, when businesses are attempting to establish a content and inbound marketing campaign, they get so caught up in getting "everything" done that they actually get nothing done at all. This is what we're going to prevent with this wrap-up, and the vision for Gatewings' marketing future is now clear in everyone's head. Despite the mental exertion on everyone's part, I'm thrilled for the engagement we've had over the last 10 or so hours.

12:30am: Time for goodbyes. It's funny how after one intense day we've been able to develop such a friendship. Personally, I'm thrilled with the results and fully believe this group of people will do what it takes. Now that they have the vision and have made "the shift," their potential is boundless.

2:00am: Jason and I are boarding the plane, headed back to Virginia. Over the past 48 hours,

I've gotten 6 hours of sleep, but by no means am I complaining. Today has been a good day, and helping people reach their potential, whether it be in life or in business, is what gets me fired up to jump out of bed each morning.

8:00am: So here I sit, again at 10,000 feet, but this time I'm 20 minutes from Richmond and reflecting on the past 36 hours as I write this blog post. I'm smiling too. These past few weeks of travel have been one powerful learning experience after another, and life is good.

How to Will Success into Your Life, One Blog Article at a Time

*****Note:** *This is one of those articles that may sound a little 'me, me, me.....I ,I, I', but please understand that my only goal here is to help others learn from my successes and failures****

I've talked so much about how blogging and content marketing can change one's business over the past year, but today I want to discuss a more personal, and quite possibly more rewarding, aspect to blogging.

As some of you are already well aware, a few years ago I wrote a small book on "Selling" that I had extremely high hopes for. But after many weeks of utter rejection from agents and publishers alike, I realized one day that as long as I had no personal brand, and as long as no one (at least outside the swimming pool industry) knew who Marcus Sheridan was, it was foolish to expect a publisher to take a risk on some 32 year old kid without a lick of value to bring to the table.

It was in this moment of self-realization that I decided to change my future. I would build my brand through a blog, and ultimately it would put me in a position to become a well-known author and speaker—something that I've always felt I was meant to do so as to help as many people as possible reach their potential.

I can vividly remember a conversation I had with my wife during this time period (Oct 2009). It went something like this:

Me: I need to tell you something and it's important.

Nikki: OK, what is it?

Me: As you already know, I've had no luck with my sales book, and this is basically due to the fact that no one knows who the heck I am. So, in order to change this, I've decided to start a platform for my own voice—a place where I can write and others can hear my thoughts, and thus attract attention.

Nikki: Sounds good. And what do you expect to be the result?

Me: In the coming months, incredible things are going to start to happen. I'm going to attract success into my life through the content I write, and eventually a publisher or publishers will approach me for a book deal. No more will I go to them. It's time to turn the tide.

This being said, in November of 2009 I started typing away, and The Sales Lion was born.

Looking back, and despite writing 3 articles a week during those first 6 months or so, very little happened. In hindsight, I now realize that I was doing a solid job with my writing, but my networking stunk. In fact, it was terrible.

Because sales and marketing is such a saturated and competitive niche, my blog was essentially a billboard in the desert.....and no one could see it.

Was I frustrated? Yeah, sure I was. Content alone had caused my swimming pool blog to go nuts (that means grow big in Marcus language) and I figured the same would happen with The Sales Lion. But alas, after spending hundreds of hours producing content, I had about 40 subscribers to show for it. Ouch.....

Luckily I had somewhat of a personal "Great Awakening" in the second half of 2010 when I realized two critical aspects to blogging success that had up to that point escaped me:

1. I needed to embrace the idea of community through comments, tweets, shares, etc.
2. I needed to focus more on giving value and promoting others than I did on myself.
- 3.

I know, sounds rather silly, doesn't it? **Like, duh Marcus!** But from this realization everything started to change.

The First Big Break

As you all know I'm a huge fan of HubSpot and inbound marketing in general. This being said, because I had experienced so much success as a customer for HubSpot I decided to write a review of their product here on TSL. After contemplating the write-up for almost a month, I sat down one day and finally put my thoughts to pen. After hours of arduous focus on creating what I felt was the "perfect" article, "[The Most Important Customer Review of HubSpot You'll Ever Read](#)" was born.

To make a long story short, the first day the article was published it was read 1500 times. The people at HS loved it and so did their customers. Before long, Google started loving it too. In fact, today it ranks on the first page of Google for a mountain of HubSpot related keywords, and has brought thousands upon thousands of people to TSL.

Having gotten HubSpot's attention with the article, they flew me out to Boston a few weeks later where I made my first of two appearances on HubSpot TV (watch hilarious video [here](#)). A few months later, I spoke at a conference for HS customers. Finally, I was able to get in front of an audience and discuss marketing. As you might imagine, this was quite thrilling and forming relationships with an incredible company manned by an army of inbound marketers has since done wonders for my blog and my brand.

Community Builds

Along with the HS relationship, after I started investing time in other bloggers and their work, the Law of Reciprocity soon took over and comments on my blog shot through the roof. Finally, my writings were getting in front of people, and my relationships with some awesome folks grew and grew.

Book Interviews

As I continued to discuss the wonders of content marketing and its affect on my pool business, all of the sudden and out of the blue authors started ringing my phone for interviews. Ann Handley was one of the first and our simple 20 minute conversation on the phone ended up being the basis to the first chapter of her bestseller, "[Content Rules.](#)" Since that time, I've been interviewed by many other authors and bloggers as well (books yet to be released) and each experience has been truly rewarding.

A-Listers

This past January I woke up one morning to see Seth Godin had commented on my blog. After letting out a huge yelp I think I read the comment 3 times just to make sure it was really him. Even [Chris Brogan](#) has kindly mentioned a few of my articles in tweets over the last few months. Again, knowing that such incredible men are reading my thoughts is exhilarating, to say it in the least.

The Next Big Step

Yesterday I was invited to speak at [Content Marketing World](#) in September. This is an event put on by **Junta 42** and as you might imagine, it's chock-full of some of the brightest content marketers in the world. Knowing that I'll be sharing a stage with so many incredible people is absolutely thrilling, and I have a feeling the experience will be yet another quantum leap along this path to success and fulfillment.

Willing Success

Although all of these transpired events have been amazing, I've honestly not been shocked or surprised with any of them. In fact, I've always *expected* these things to happen. As I told my wife those many months ago, great things would inevitably happen if I but put in the time.

The great Jim Rohn once said “*Success is something you attract by becoming an attractive person.*”

These past 16 months of blogging have verified this statement to me again and again and again. As I look forward, I can see the day when I get that phone call from a book publisher. When will it happen? Honestly, I have no idea, but I can tell you *it will*. If I but continue to walk this path, success will have no choice but to accompany me along the journey.

Is Web Marketing Worth Putting Your Small Business into Debt?

I have found there are 2 truisms regarding small business web marketing: **Businesses can't afford a great web marketing strategy** **Businesses can't afford *not* to have a great web marketing strategy.**

I mention these two opposing statements as truisms because the fact is, whenever a business is looking to initiate a proper web marketing strategy (no, I'm not referring to a \$500, 4-page website) it's **always** going to be too expensive at first. Coming up with a website that doesn't actually suck but rather speaks to and informs consumers takes time, effort, and money. Using an all-in-one platform for blogging, analytics, web design, and lead tracking like [HubSpot](#) can seem a little rough for small businesses to swallow, especially in today's economy.

But as I'm sure you already know, EVERY successful small business today and beyond *must* have a great web marketing strategy. Expecting the phone to ring these days while relying solely on word of mouth or [antiquated marketing mediums](#) is a sheer sign of delusion.

The Fear of Change

I can distinctively recall the position my business partners and I were in a little over 2 years ago when the economy took a nose-dive. We were struggling to pay the bills, failing to generate enough leads and sales, and couldn't even afford to pay the [Google Adwords](#) charge that was slapping our company credit card silly ever few days with another \$500 kick to the groin. Yep, times were tough and as a swimming pool company, the future of our industry was looking very, very bleak.

But as I've mentioned in the past, it was during this time that we learned what inbound marketing was and quickly realized that if we wanted to save our business, we'd have to bite the bullet and do whatever it took to get our company's web presence where it needed to be. Therefore, instead of wallowing in our sorrow and debt we decided to take what at the time seemed to be a huge leap of faith and put a few more thousand dollars (none of which we had) on our company credit card in order to begin this important marketing shift.

I look back on this experience with a fond smile. Within a few months of dedicated inbound marketing (redoing our website, [content and video production](#), etc.), we had more than paid back our initial investment. In fact, after our first year of using HubSpot I did the math and concluded we had saved over \$100k in advertising that we'd spent for the same results the previous year. In other words, our return on investment was off the charts and the question of whether or not the money we'd invested initially was worth it became a complete joke.

No Looking Back

This is also why I can only shake my head today when I speak with businesses who've contacted my [web coaching company](#) in an effort to solve their web marketing dilemmas yet shirk over the idea of spending a few thousand bucks. What's crazy is that many of these companies know they're in trouble. They also know that a great web presence is imperative for any business looking to make it in the information age. Yet they hedge, resist and rationalize. They also hope the world will return to what it once was.

But as we have all figured out by this point, we ain't going back to the 90s and 2000s ever again. Those two decades of prosperity were a farce in many ways. Today's economy demands that businesses put themselves out there. It demands they have a web presence that teaches, informs,

and educates the public. It's not so much about frivolous sales and marketing ploys any longer. It's about value through education-based marketing. This is the world in which we now live, and frankly, I love it.

So for those business owners of you out there right now that are still reluctant to look forward and pull the trigger on changes you already know need to be made, I ask you to stop waiting. Stop delaying your success and prosperity. Stop putting off the impressions that have been eating at you for months and months.

Start teaching. Start informing. Start marketing the right way.

Embrace the web. It is your friend. And it just might save your business.....if you'll only let it.

A Tale of Two Bloggers: Our Individual Journey to Online Success

On October 12th, 2009, a small business owner on the West Coast had an inkling—he wanted to start an “online magazine” (aka blog) about this thing called “**social media marketing**.”

About the same time (only a few weeks later), all the way across the United States on the East Coast, another small business owner decided to use his skills to start a social media marketing blog as well.

Both guys were successful businessmen. Both were driven. And both had a vision of rising to the top of their field.

The Journey Begins

By the end of Nov. of 2009, the West Coast blogger had experienced huge success. In fact, by leveraging his existing resources and networks, he received over 25,000 visitors in his first month. Not only that, but he, with a mere 6 weeks of existence, was ranked by [Technorati](#) in the “Top 100 Small Business Blogs” for the **entire world**.

In the meantime, the East Coast blogger fired out the gates as well, producing as much content as he possibly could and doing his best to garner readers. By the end of the month, and after hours of diligent work, East Coast blogger had amassed a whopping **116 visitors**.

By the end of Jan. 2010, West Coast blogger had achieved what would have been unfathomable just months before upon inception—Over 55,000 visitors in one month with each post averaging 200-1000 retweets. Simply put, the rapid growth was nothing short of unbelievable, the likes of which had never been seen in the social media realm.

East Coast blogger also continued to churn out content during this time. In fact, by the end of Jan. 2010, and after writing 3-4 articles a week, he managed to reach just over 500 total visitors to his site with an average of 3 retweets per post.

But the magical run didn't stop there for West Coast blogger. Just one month later, by the end of Feb. 2010, his blog was ranked "Top 10" in the world by Technorati for small business blogs and had already surpassed 10,000 subscribers.

As for East Coast blogger, he just kept pushing as hard as he possibly could—740 visitors for the month of February, and a subscriber count of **53 loyal readers. Fast Forward**

Over the next 20 months, both bloggers continued to do their very best to give great content and value to their readers. Each worked doggedly, wrote often, and strove to grow their readership. In fact, by September of 2011, West Coast blogger had continued his rise to social media super-stardom by amassing 110,000 subscribers, 2 published books, and establishing the most well-known [online social media summit](#) in the world.

And East Coast blogger? About 2000 subscribers, no books, and no summits.

*(Note from Marcus***Ok, stop for a second and be honest with this question: If you were to analyze and compare these two gentlemen, would you say East Coast blogger had massively underachieved during his two years of blogging? C'mon, be honest, what say ye??)*

(.....story continued)

That same month, in September of 2011, West Coast blogger and East Coast blogger met in person during the opening ceremonies of [Content Marketing World](#) in Cleveland. Within minutes of their meeting, the two hit it off well and managed to strike up a nice friendship over the next 2 days, with West Coast blogger playing the part of "mentor" and East Coast blogger eagerly playing the part of "student"

No Need to Compare

As I'm sure most of you are already aware, "West Coast blogger" is the great **Michael Stelzner** of [Social Media Examiner](#), and "East Coast blogger" is yours truly—Me. Mr. Lion. Mufasa. Mane Man. You name it. And yes, the numbers I've given you are accurate.

To be honest, "shock" were the first thoughts that ran through my head when Michael and I met at Content Marketing World. There we were, chatting away at the opening event, and after inquiring as to when his blog started and what type of growth he's had, and then finding out his staggering achievements, I just about spit my Diet Coke on the floor.

Simply put, I was stunned.....amazed.....flabbergasted.....you name it.

That night, as I walked the streets of Cleveland back to my hotel room I kept repeating the same number:

"110k subscribers"

"110k subscribers"

"110k subscribers"

And then followed it up with:

"Geez Marcus, what the heck have you been doing wrong for the last two years?"

What Truly Matters

But within hours of having this silly internal conversation, reality and common sense returned and I concluded what I know to be true:

Could I have done better during this time period had I a little more smarts, or a stronger network, or a better strategy? Yes, I'm sure I could have. But this much I also know—**I have given The Sales Lion all I've got. I've reached my own level of success. I'm experiencing joy along this journey. And this is what truly matters.**

What's funny is the fact that many bloggers look at TSL and the success I've had in recent months and in comparison feel bad for what *they've* not accomplished (smaller numbers, lack of "name recognition," etc.).

The Curse of Comparative Blogging

If there is one bad habit I think just about every blogger in the world has (or has had) is that of comparing one's own success or lack thereof with that of another blogger (this certainly applies to business as well).

Over the last two years, some of my lowest moments and deepest frustrations have come from looking at other bloggers and wondering why I couldn't reach the heights they had managed to achieve.

But with each low moment, just as I did with my friend Michael, I took a step back to see my progress, my triumphs, and just how far I've come up this incredible mountain.

So here is the deal folks:

Stop negatively comparing you, your business, and your blog with others.

Sure, it's fine to see what they're doing well and **mimic their successful strategies**, but for the love of Pete do not allow yourself to get depressed because "you don't stack up." Fact is, we are all on our own path, with our own time-frames.

Success is not cut from the same cloth for any of us. So let us embrace those differences. Let us cheer on and learn from the Michael Stelznerns of the world, and then be the best *we* can possibly be, comparing ourselves to no one along the way but learning to enjoy every minute of the journey.

Get Uncomfortable: The Best Business and Life Choice You'll Ever Make

As I sat yesterday afternoon with my business partner Jason Hughes in a sauna at the Excalibur Hotel's health club in Vegas, I was brought back to a conversation he and I had exactly a year before in the exact same place, sitting on the exact same bench. Here's how it went:

Jason: “You did great in your seminar today bud.”

Me: “Thanks man. But let me ask you something: Why aren’t you speaking here too?”

Jason: (with a pensive look and half smile) “You know, I’ve never really thought about that.....I’m going to apply.”

Me: (with a really big smile) “Awesome. You’re going to be great. I can’t wait.”

You see, last year was my 3rd time speaking at the National Pool/Spa show in Vegas. And every year, Jason had attended my sessions and always been such a tremendous support. But being a “shy” guy, he’d never considered the fact that he could give an incredibly valuable seminar to attendees as well—that is, until I asked.

So, throwing caution and comfort aside, Jason trusted his gut. He applied to speak shortly after our conversation in the sauna. Weeks later, he was given the green light. And exactly one year later, he gave one of the best classes the swimming pool industry has ever seen on how to build a fiberglass swimming pool.

Am I proud of the guy? Yeah, you bet I am.

The Problem with Comfort Zones

I relay this story because it coincides perfectly with a statement given by [Peter Shankman](#) in his incredible keynote at [Blog World LA](#) :

“Nothing good ever comes from staying in your comfort zone.”

Ahh yes, how true it is.

I’ll repeat:

“Nothing good ever comes from staying in your comfort zone.”

As he will naturally admit, my dear friend Jason is an introvert. He is not one that has ever felt the need nor desire to be in the middle of the spotlight. Notwithstanding, the guy has amazing talents and abilities, and yesterday he was able to share them with many, many business owners

that needed his help.

Thus, because he was willing to put himself in an uncomfortable situation, Jason touched lives, families, and businesses.

Such is the way life works.

My Uncomfortable Road to Success and Happiness

At 20 years of age and a sophomore in college, I decided to drop everything and [live in Chile](#) for two years. Uncomfortable? Oh yes. Rewarding? I can't even begin to explain the foundation that time period laid for the rest of my life.

At 23 year of age I was attending college again, but now married, and expecting my first child. To top it off, I was writing a book (a memoir of my time in Chile) and working 25 hours a week. Uncomfortable? Yes. Rewarding? My wife and I look back at our time in Morgantown with a fondness that simply can't be put into words.

At 25 I went into business with my two partners and opened a swimming pool company in Virginia. For years we struggled through hardships, [embezzlements](#), and frustration. Clearly, this was the most uncomfortable and stressful time of my life. Was it worth it? My goodness yes. The trials forced us to think in ways we never would have imagined. Without question, those years were the refiner's fire of my life.

At the age of 31 I embraced [HubSpot](#), inbound marketing, and the Internet. Uncomfortable? Considering I'd always been a "tech-dummy," you better believe it was.

Rewarding? Everything **The Sales Lion** is, and all of the success this blog has had, is a direct result of that momentous decision. Plus, considering the fact that Inbound Marketing saved my pool company and gave me the opportunity to further pursue my passion of speaking and helping other businesses, I'd say, "Yes, it was dang worth it!"

Today, I find myself speaking around the country to different businesses, groups, and conferences. Without question, speaking to large audiences of people that expect to be fed great information and value can be a little uncomfortable. But the reward? My career has exploded. The message I bring literally is changing lives and saving businesses. That, my friends, makes any discomfort dissipate into the joy of knowing I'm doing what I was put here on Earth to do.

Is It Time to Leave Your Comfort Zone?

In the blog post I wrote, “ [Hey Blogger, Eventually You Actually Have to Do Something](#)”, I mentioned the fact that once a tree stops growing it dies. The same can be said for us as bloggers, business owners, and human beings. We must continue to grow. We must stretch ourselves just enough to experience the joys that come with such challenges.

So that's my charge to you on this day my friends. **Get uncomfortable.** Start that blog. [Push record on that video camera](#). Send that application you've had sitting on your desk. Make that phone call that has been on your mind. The list could go on and on, but you know what that “it” is for you. And as you do these things, I promise **the rewards of tomorrow will far outweigh the discomfort of today.**

20 Life-Changing Habits That Will Make the Next Year Your Best Year Ever

The New Year is a fresh start for all of us.

This past year for me was a special and memorable one, and I've decided to make a list of the habits, behaviors, and actions that made such a year possible, as the momentum seems to keep growing by the day.

Instead of listing all the things you *should* be doing to make this year great, I want to talk about the things you may want to consider stopping as this new year rolls forward. I've been working on every single one of these habits for well over a year now, and I'd strongly urge you to consider each, as their impact on my life has been unbelievable.

But if you feel like some of these suggestions don't apply to your situation, then happily chuck them aside and move on to the next one.

Here goes.....**20 Life-Changing Habits That Will Make the Next Year Your Best Year Ever**

1. Stop Thinking you can do this alone.

That's right, you can't. We all have weakness, and we all need others to reach our full potential.

Behind every great man and woman there are multiple pillars of support in the shadows.

Since the very beginning of time, man was not meant to be alone, and this principle has not changed whatsoever these many, many years.

2. Stop telling people, including yourself, that you're tired.

Seriously, how many times have you made this statement in your life? For some folks, it's their natural response to being asked, "How are you?"

But the hard truth is **no one cares that you or I are tired**. By verbalizing the feeling it not only becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, but it also brings others down in the process.

3. Stop Worry About Stupid Numbers that Don't Matter, Like Klout.

I personally talked with Joe Fernandez, founder of Klout recently. Here was our conversation:

Me: Joe, your system interests me, it's visionary, and I can see why many people put so much stock in Klout scores. Notwithstanding, if I'm going to be busting my tail anyway, I don't think it really matters if I know my Klout score or not, which is why I see no need to check it. What's your take?

Joe: Actually, that's very true.

The time has come for all of us to stop worrying about so many metrics that don't really mean a darn thing. In business, we should be worrying about **customers and profits**. In life, we should be worried about peace, happiness, and fulfillment. The rest, too often, is simply empty noise.

(Oh, and if you don't know what Klout is, don't bother looking it up, as it doesn't matter)

4. Stop Watching the News

I don't care if you're Republican, Democrat, whatever—the news stinks. I stopped watching it a little over a year ago and I became a happier person. The moment I realized 99.9% of what I was watching was outside my circle of influence, I happily let it sail off into the sunset without me.

(Note*** Just because you don't watch the news, doesn't mean you're not informed or don't care about the world. You'll be amazed at how the news will still find you if you adhere to what I'm suggesting here.)

5. Stop Allowing Yourself To Get Pinged to Death.

I laugh when people tell me they can handle writing a blog post while having their phone go off with every text message, email, etc. Fact is, we all grossly over-estimate our ability to “multitask.” In fact, because we can only have one thought in our head at a time, the idea of multi-tasking, for the most part, is a complete myth.

A few months ago I turned my phone on silent. No longer do I hear any pings. I check it every 30-60 minutes as needed, but it no longer runs my life.

Do yourself a favor and take charge of the technology, noise, and distractions in your life. I can assure you, it will make all the difference in the world.

6. Stop Wasting Your Vehicle Time.

Most people will not agree with this statement, but the majority of radio we listen to in the car is a complete waste of brain cells. Yes, music can be nice and soothing, but so can an inspirational or educational podcast, so can a book on CD, and so can silent meditation.

This past year I listened to well over 50 books, plus hundreds of talks and seminars, while looking through the windshield of my vehicle—and what a difference it made in my day to day thoughts and emotions.

7. Stop Waiting to Ask Others for Forgiveness

If there is anyone in life that you've had a falling out with, the time to carry that weight around with you must come to an end. Call the person. Whether you were wrong or not, **ask for forgiveness**. Just let it go. Let me assure you it will be one of the most empowering and enlightening experiences of your life.

8. Stop Saying Yes to Every “Opportunity”

The more successful you become, the more you'll need to say "no" to others. I never understood this principle until the magic of momentum came into my life so strongly in 2011, but today I find myself saying "no" much more than I say "yes."

9. Stop Trying to Be Everything to Everybody.

Remember our little conversation about "[knowing your shtick](#)"? In business and in life, the quickest way to unhappiness and frustration is by trying to be everything to everybody.

Accept the fact that you're just not a good fit with certain people.

Accept the reality that your business wasn't meant to do certain things.

Just be good at being you. Embrace who and what that is, and run with it without looking back.

10. Stop Waiting for Your "Big Break;" It Doesn't Exist.

I used to say to myself, "I think this might be my big break" whenever something "great" would happen. But shortly thereafter, things would get back to normal and I'd realize the "big-break" was just another small step in the path towards reaching my goals.

Today, I don't think about "big breaks" any longer. I solely try to string as many consistent positive moments together, day after day, with the hopes that eventually it will snowball into the success vision that I currently have in my head.

11. Stop Reading This Blog If You Haven't Ever Applied Anything I've Said.

No, I'm not kidding. If you've been reading my blog for months or years and still have yet to apply what you've read, **I beg you to unsubscribe this second and go do something that really matters.**

12. Stop Trying to Be on Every Social Media Platform.

You can't be Mr. Twitter, Mr. Facebook, Mr. LinkedIn, Mr. Google+, Mr. Blog, and Mr. "Soup of the Day" social media platform. It simply doesn't work like that. Again, know your shtick.

Don't be a jack of all trades and master of none. Find greatness in at least one area first and then move on.

13. Stop Denying Your Spiritual Side

I don't care if you're Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, whatever—the spiritual stuff matters. Finding happiness in life is about achieving balance on an emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual level. More and more, people are thinking they don't need to lean on their spiritual roots to reach their potential, but the reality is we all need to look up a little more often and “return to source.”

14. Stop Doing What You've Been Prompted a Hundred Times to Stop Doing.

I'm not going to tell you what this one is because it's your prompting, not mine. I just know you keep getting it. So do I. Now let's stop making excuses and tackle the dang thing, shall we??

15. Stop Telling Yourself Why It Won't Work.

Was I ready to start **The Sales Lion** when I did? Heck no. There were a million reasons why the timing was bad, why the resources just weren't yet there, and why my lack of knowledge would hinder success.

But I did it anyway, and it was the greatest business decision of my life.

Stop counting the reasons why that prompting you've been getting won't work. Now start counting the reasons why it *will* be a success.

And when you're done, go launch that baby.

16. Stop Agreeing With Other People So Much.

The time has come to question the status-quo. It's also time to stop nodding your head “yes” when your favorite friend, writer, or political leader says what's good and what's not good.

Listen to your gut. Give heed to your intuition. You were given that gift for a reason—to use it.

17. Stop Saying You'll Start Eating Healthy and Losing Weight.

Fact: No one ever lost any weight by talking about dieting.

So instead of talking about it, start eating less, working out more, and taking back control of your physical self.

18. Stop Texting and Driving.

I'll be honest in saying I used to have this problem, but I got tired of seeing and hearing about people dying due to distracted driving. Today, I drive with my phone on silent and despite the fact that I don't answer my messages in real-time, life still finds a way manage OK.

19. Stop Consuming So Much Information without Doing Anything.

Seriously, do you really think that next eBook for \$27.99 is going to tell you way more than you already know? It amazes me how many people would rather "consume" all day than actually apply the teachings they've been reading and hearing again and again and again.

The fact is most of us don't need any more information, **we just need to actually do something.**

20. Stop Waiting to Tell Those You Most Care About How Much You Love Them.

I'm serious about this one. Many of you know what I'm talking about because you've recently experienced the death of a loved one.

One of the greatest moments of my life was when I wrote my grandfather a very long letter, expressing my deepest personal feelings and sentiments, shortly before he died a few years ago. I cannot imagine the regret I would have had I not listened to the prompting I received and written him that letter.